DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 468 236 CE 083 773

AUTHOR	Saunders, Stephen; Saunders, John
TITLE	Getting Adults into the Trades [and] Case Studies.
INSTITUTION	National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Leabrook (Australia).
ISBN	ISBN-1-74096-062-9; ISBN-1-74096-085-8
PUB DATE	2002-00-00
NOTE	85p.
AVAILABLE FROM	National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 252 Kensington Road, Leabrook, South Australia 5068, Australia (Main report: ISBN-1-74096-062-9, Catalog no. 844, $25.30 Australian; Case Studies: ISBN-1-74096-085-8, Web edition only). Tel: 08 8333 8400; Fax: 08 8331 9211; e-mail: vet_req@ncver.edu.au; Web site: http://www.ncver.edu.au. For full text of main report: http://www.ncver.edu.au/research/core/cp0002.pdf. For full text of Case Studies: http://downloads.weblogger.com/gems/cpj/CCImplementationGuide.pdf.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS
DESCRIPTORS	Adult Programs; Adult Students; *Adult Vocational Education; *Apprenticeships; Building Trades; Career Development; Case Studies; Demand Occupations; Education Work Relationship; Educational Policy; Employer Attitudes; Employer Employee Relationship; Employment Patterns; *Employment Practices; Employment Qualifications; Foreign Countries; Job Skills; Job Training; Labor Turnover; *Nontraditional Students; Personnel Management; Policy Formation; Postsecondary Education; Public Policy; Questionnaires; *Recruitment; Skill Development; *Trade and Industrial Education; Trainers
IDENTIFIERS	*Australia; TAFE (Australia)

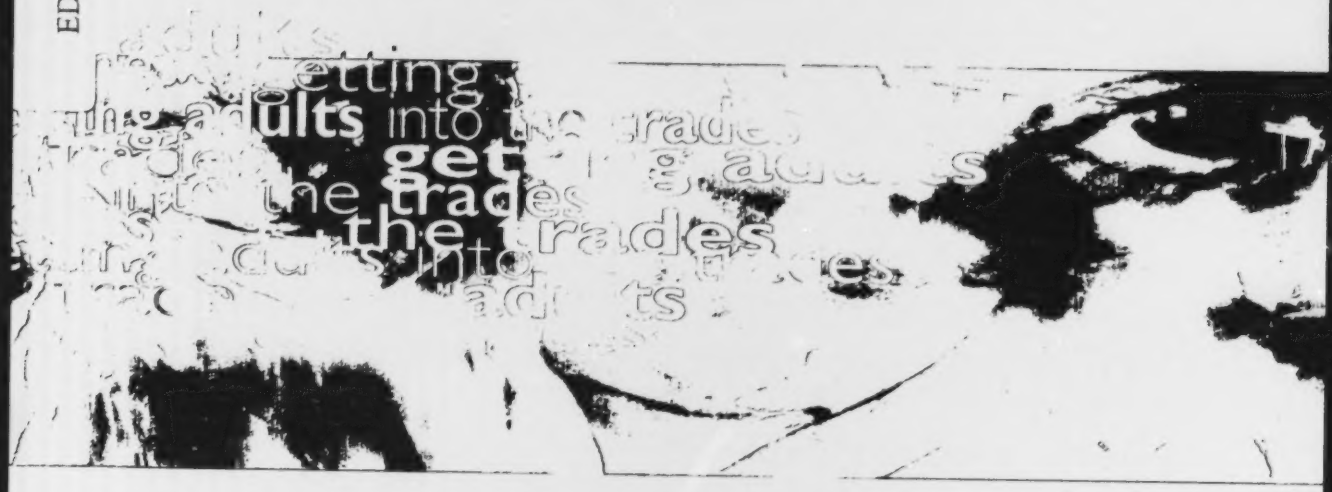
ABSTRACT

Case studies of 16 firms across Australia that employ adult apprentices in the "traditional" trades were conducted to identify innovative ways of getting adults into the trades. The case studies included interviews with the firms' apprentice managers, training providers, and adult apprentices. Although some adult-friendly innovations were found, few companies had implemented a strategic model for recruiting and retaining adults in their key trades. About half the companies still used technical and further education as the main off-the-job training provider. New approaches to recruitment were boosting adult apprentice opportunities. Adult apprentices were completing individual blocks of training early. Employers and training providers were confident in adult apprentices but not confident that their numbers will rise. The information gathered during the case studies was synthesized into recommendations regarding the following issues: reviewing adult apprenticeship trends and policy; managing adult apprentice costs and wages; broadening adult trade and skill pathways; and training adult apprentices for skill gaps and shortages. The case study questions are appended. A companion document contains the case studies, which include both the employer training perspective and the perspectives of training providers and apprentices. The case studies involve firms in these trades: automotive, metal, electrical, building, aero, and printing. (Contains 53 references.) (MN)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 468 236

NCVER



Getting adults into the trades

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
S. HAYMAN
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
2B

Stephen Saunders

John Saunders

CE083 113

2.1

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Getting adults into the trades

Stephen Saunders

John Saunders

NCVER

Publisher's note

This report has a companion volume *Getting adults into the trades: Case studies*, which can be found on NCVER's website www.ncver.edu.au

© 2002 National Centre for Vocational Education Research Ltd

ISBN 1 74096 062 9 print edition
1 74096 063 7 web edition

TD/TNC 70.04

Published by
National Centre for Vocational Education Research Ltd
ABN 87 007 967 311

252 Kensington Road, Leabrook, SA 5068
PO Box 115, Kensington Park, SA 5068, Australia
www.ncver.edu.au

Contents

Acknowledgements 5

Executive summary 7

Getting adults into the trades: Statistics and research 11

- General trends in apprenticeships and traineeships 11
- Training trends in trades and 'traditional' trades 12
- Research pointers on adults in the 'traditional' trades 15
- Summary 23

Getting adults into the trades: The case studies 25

- Background to case studies 25
- Employers' training perspectives 27
- Providers' and apprentices' perspectives 33
- Summary 35

Conclusions 38

- Background to the report 38
- Research and case studies reviewed 38
- Themes and strategies 39

References 45

Appendix: Questions used in the case studies 47

Tables

Table 1: Numbers and percentages in training, by 'traditional' and all trade groups, by age group, December 1995, 1998 and 2000 14

Table 2: Numbers and percentages in training for 'traditional' trades, by age group by sex, December 1995 and 2000 15

Table 3: Apprenticeship completions (C), trade workforces (W) and rates of training (R) in 'traditional' trades, 1986, 1995 and 2000 22

Table 4: Employers of adult apprentices in the case studies, by State, industry and 'traditional' trade characteristics, 2001 27

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the following individuals representing companies, group training schemes, training providers, training agencies, industry organisations, and adult apprentices, for their contributions to the development and content of the case studies.

Employers have had the opportunity to comment on their individual case studies, which appear in full in the companion report *Getting adults into the trades: Case studies*. The authors take responsibility for the comparative analysis of the case studies.

Ron Berendson, Steve Crofts and Alan Harris (staff)	Gough and Gilmour, Parramatta, NSW
Stuart Pilgrim (apprentice)	Gough and Gilmour, Parramatta, NSW
Brian Openshaw (staff)	Crane Copper Tube, Penrith, NSW
Russell McGuire and Bill Wood (apprentices)	Crane Copper Tube, Penrith, NSW
Bob Fagan (provider for Crane Copper)	West Sydney Institute of TAFE, Mt Druitt, NSW
Cathy McClelland and Chris Morgan	Department of Education and Training, Sydney, NSW
Manager of apprentice training	'Auto components supplier', Melbourne, Vic
Barry Steer and Sue Kent (staff)	Melbourne East Group Training, Vic
Alan Montague (training provider)	Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Vic
Ian Grant (staff)	Flight West, Brisbane, Qld
Kevin Condon (provider for Flight West)	Aviation Training for Aviation Engineers, Archerfield, Qld
Matt Row (staff)	Building Industry Group Apprenticeships, Brisbane, Qld
Peter Eicklenloff	Dept of Employment and Training, Brisbane, Qld
Ian Randell, Peter Danks and Chris Webster (staff)	Hamersley Iron, Dampier, WA
Dean Lombardo (apprentice)	Hamersley Iron, Dampier, WA
Bob Littlewood and Bob Hunter (providers for Hamersley)	West Pilbara College of TAFE, Karratha, WA
Kiersten Gregg and Grant Cochrane (staff)	Wesfarmers CSBP, Kwinana, WA
Mario Caputo and Mick Price (apprentices)	Wesfarmers CSBP, Kwinana, WA
Fred Osborne (provider for Wesfarmers)	Challenger TAFE, Rockingham, WA
Bill Davison and Percy Rebeiro (staff)	Westpower Services, Kewdale, WA
Jeremy Middleton (apprentice)	Westpower Services, Kewdale, WA
Kevin Tierney (provider for Westpower)	Chamber of Commerce and Industry of WA, Kwinana Skills Centre, WA
Gary Collins (provider for the WA companies)	Chamber of Commerce and Industry of WA
David Holmes, Sam Civitillo, Serge Minervini and Graeme Young (staff)	Electrolux, Adelaide, SA
Troy Carter, Trevor Ferguson and Matt Oeschger (apprentices)	Electrolux, Adelaide, SA
Adrian Quintell and Nick Thompson (apprentices)	Electrolux, Adelaide, SA
Pat Bosco (provider for Electrolux)	Engineering Employers of SA Group Training Scheme
Matt Poland and Allan Fowler (staff)	Griffin Press, Adelaide, SA
Craig Briar, Barry Crawford and Troy Rosser (apprentices)	Griffin Press, Adelaide, SA

Andrew McGowan, Dave Reimann and Danny Symons (providers for Griffin)	Douglas Mawson Institute of TAFE, Croydon Park, SA
Andrew Craddock and Michael Jones (staff)	Andrew Craddock Marine, Adelaide, SA
David Wait (apprentice)	Andrew Craddock Marine, Adelaide, SA
Ashley Pearce and Frank Berra (staff)	Australian Motors, Adelaide, SA
David Corboy (apprentice)	Australian Motors, Adelaide, SA
Mark Cockayne and Nicholas Taddeo (staff)	City Holden, Adelaide, SA
Tammy Barker (apprentice)	City Holden, Adelaide, SA
Paul Abbott and Allan Mitten (staff)	Formula Honda, Adelaide, SA
Glen Marchioni (apprentice)	Formula Honda, Adelaide, SA
Patricia Bigiolli and Dale Stuchbury (staff)	Paradise Motors, Adelaide, SA
Greg Hansford (apprentice)	Paradise Motors, Adelaide, SA
Mario Marrone (provider for the SA motor companies)	Motor Trade Association Group Training Scheme, Adelaide, SA
Andrew Boorman	Department of Education, Training and Employment, Adelaide, SA
Diane McGuinness (staff)	Elwick Rd Bodyworks, Glenorchy, Tas
Phil Keoppen (apprentice)	Elwick Rd Bodyworks, Glenorchy, Tas
Michael Dempsey and Daniel Albert	Office of Post-Compulsory Education and Training, Hobart, Tas
Don Butt (staff)	ActewAGL, Canberra, ACT
Chris Hardy and Dave Watson (staff)	ACT Master Builders' Association Group Training, Canberra, ACT
Mark Smith (apprentice)	ACT Master Builders' Association Group Training, Canberra, ACT
Neil Lamb (staff)	ACT Electro Group, Canberra, ACT
Steve Balzary	Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Canberra, ACT

Executive summary

With the ageing of the Australian population, changing life career patterns, and continuing shortfalls in supply in the 'traditional' trades, school leaver apprenticeships no longer meet most or all workforce demands. Adults are becoming an increasingly important recruitment source. This is the rationale for this report on getting adults into the trades.

The report begins with a summary of relevant statistics and research on adults in trades, followed by a detailed analysis of employer-based case studies conducted in 2001. The final chapter develops concluding themes and strategies for getting adults into the trades.

Australia's apprenticeship and traineeship system has been transformed. After a long period of little growth, training numbers grew rapidly from 1995. The apprenticeship and traineeship system has more than doubled in size, from 136 000 contracts of training (apprenticeships and traineeships) in mid-1995 to 295 000 by the end of 2000. Traineeships now comprise half of the numbers in training, compared to 10% in 1995. Women now comprise more than 30%, compared to 5% in 1995.

Traineeships have expanded around, rather than at the expense of, the trades. The trades, and the core 'traditional' trades groups (metal, auto, electrical and electronic, and construction), have maintained their training numbers and shares of total employment. They absorb new technologies and skills to stay relevant to the contemporary Australian economy.

However, the composition of trade training is quite different from that of contracted training generally. Whereas the 25-and-over age group accounts for more than 30% of all training at the end of 2000, they only occupy about 14% of all 'trades and related' training or 12% of all training in traditional trades. Women occupy more than 30% of all training places at the end of 2000, but only 13% in 'trades and related' and just 1% in the traditional trades. The issue of 'women in trades' appears to have fallen from view in VET policy.

While there is little research relating directly to the question of 'adults in the traditional trades', a number of recent VET studies and reports are relevant to the consideration of their prospects. As a background to the case studies, these are considered here.

The post-1998 new apprenticeships system and recognition framework, the report notes, introduce revised concepts that will impact on trade training and adults in trades. These include VET-in-Schools programs, 'user choice', new apprenticeships centres, and training packages with competency-based training. Rather than being derived from national VET policy prescriptions, the current interest in adults in trades appears to relate to the general ageing of the population and labour force, and to the supply–demand situations in the trades.

Studies show that the customary four-year trade indenture is a net cost to the firm, which may be borne in deference to social commitments to training or expectations of keeping on the apprentice. Employer costs are higher in the 'traditional' trades compared with others.

There is cautious experimentation with 'alternative pathways', but these are not common in the core 'traditional' trades. The rate of workforce replenishment into the 'traditional' trades through formal apprenticeships remains consistently low, about 2% per annum. It is not surprising,

therefore, that shortages might continue, or that non-apprenticeship or adult training pathways might open up over time. Recent national industry-sponsored studies on trade skill shortages highlight the importance of adult training opportunities in this context.

The case studies analysed in this report appear in full in a separate National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) web publication, *Getting adults into the trades: Case studies*. About 30 companies employing adult apprentices in the 'traditional' trades were approached, resulting in 16 participants from all States and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). Questions were directed to firms' apprentice managers, to their training providers and adult apprentices. The sample was representative of the 'traditional' trades workforce, with manufacturers and group training companies being prominent. About 7% of the firms' 1800 apprentices were over 25. Reflecting national statistics, very few were females.

While there are adult-friendly innovations, few of the companies could be said to have implemented a broad, or strategic, model for getting and retaining adults in their key trades.

About half of the companies still use technical and further education (TAFE) as the main off-the-job provider, with others redirecting training into group schemes or their own skills centres. New approaches to recruitment are boosting adult apprentice opportunities. A few companies primarily draw apprentices from annual school leaver intakes. Others may apprentice existing (adult) employees, or outsource recruitment to their group schemes.

A key point in the case studies is the adjustments that may or may not be made to accommodate 'high–low' adult apprentice wages. The wages tend to be 'high' from the employer perspective relative to junior rates, but 'low' from the apprentice perspective relative to adult wages generally. While this issue may not be getting much attention in formal industrial agreements, employers do make useful localised wage adjustments, particularly by keeping the adults on at their existing company wages or offering overtime.

When measured against the potentially positive impacts on training costs and skill shortages, acceleration of adult trade apprentices through wage and competency levels is uncommon. It may increase as trade-related training packages increase their market penetration.

Adult apprentices are completing individual blocks of training early and, to a limited extent, may 'sign off' their entire indentures early. Some employers give their adult apprentices enhanced outcomes and opportunities, including 'dual ticketing' in metal and electrical trades, special projects and skills within the apprenticeship, or assistance with study towards post-trade management and professional jobs. Such opportunities can ease the financial or family difficulties that may be experienced through the previously mentioned 'low' wages.

Employers' and training providers' confidence in adult apprentices is not matched by a confidence that their numbers will rise. Adult apprentices are valued for their maturity, mentoring of younger colleagues, dependability and safety-consciousness. These positive features tend to outweigh any perceived workplace inflexibilities or learning difficulties.

Reflecting recent research, most companies report high training completion rates among adult apprentices. Unfortunately, they tend to use up suitable internal applicants quickly; moreover, they do not expect many more suitable external applicants to appear under current industrial conditions. Some employers urge extra government placement assistance, income support, or employer incentives, for adult apprentices. One calls for broad improvements in the support given to post-trade (adult) training and company training infrastructure.

Reinforcing employer views, training providers make a point of adult apprentices' contributions to class cohesion, discussion and outcomes. Astute training providers can adjust the learning materials or environment to suit adult apprentices, or may consciously pair adults with their peers or with juniors to improve class stability and learning outcomes.

The adult apprentices have diverse backgrounds. Some are classic 'second-chance' apprentices or 'adult improvers', whose new skills build up smaller firms' quality and productivity. Others in larger firms are 'high achievers', including former VET or university students, with career and management aspirations. While praising employer and training provider support, interviewees baulk at the low wages or lengthy qualification periods.

The third chapter of the report recapitulates the main features of the research and case studies and develops concluding *themes and strategies* for getting adults into the trades.

Reviewing adult apprenticeship trends and policy

This theme originates from a comparison of adult apprenticeship trends and the treatment of adult training issues in VET policy. Recent adult and female gains are much lower in the 'traditional' trades than in training generally, and the case studies do not suggest further strong gains, although adults can make particular contributions to skill gaps and shortages. The following actions are suggested for more intensive policy scrutiny of adult training:

- more intensive reporting of trends in adult and adult female apprenticeships
- emphasising, in VET performance measurement, adult training priorities and outcomes
- possible indicative targets for adult and adult female training in 'traditional' trades

Managing adult apprentice costs and wages

This theme results from case-study findings that 'high–low' adult apprentice wages are a key disincentive to increased numbers. The case studies reinforce research findings that training and adult training needs are not prominent issues in industrial agreements. Employers commonly make practical wage or overtime adjustments to help adult apprentices through, but reductions in the indenture period are uncommon. The following industrial and training actions are suggested for managing adult apprentices' costs and increasing their numbers:

- encouraging the practice of employing adult apprentices on equivalent company wages
- re-examining relevant trade awards for fair variations to accommodate adult apprentices
- compensating 'low-wage' adult apprentices with shorter indentures or enhanced skilling
- enhancing the employer incentives that attach to adult apprentices in trades

Broadening adult trade and skill pathways

This issue relates to the evidence of progress with, but constraints to, adult apprentice pathways in trades. Statistically, non-trade pathways to skills are increasing in volume. In the case studies, innovations with training providers, recruitment, wage and competency progressions, enhanced skill and post-trade career progressions, all benefit adult trade apprentices. The following actions are suggested to broaden adult trade and skill pathways:

- developing and documenting 'model' pathways for adults in 'traditional' trades
- increasing pre-vocational and non-trade adult pathways towards the 'traditional' trades
- introducing forms of enterprise training support to boost adult and post-trade training
- considering forms of adult employer or adult study benefits for the post-trades areas

Training adult apprentices for skill gaps and shortages

This theme relates to the potential of adults towards ameliorating recurrent under-supplies and skill shortages in the 'traditional' trades, where annual replenishment rates through formal apprenticeship barely reach 2%. In view of their high training completion rates and capacity to fill

different skill and career niches in enterprises and industries, adults can make a greater contribution to meeting skill shortages. The following actions are suggested:

- ✧ investigation, and promotion, of high adult apprenticeship completion rates
- ✧ promotion to industry of adults as a supply group for niche trade and post-trade markets
- ✧ adult trade and skill pathways that respond to national industry skill shortage studies

Adult apprentices contributing to cohorts' training outcomes

The case studies demonstrate that adult trade apprentices raise the quality of on- and off-the-job training in their work and class groups. Adult apprentices are seen as committed, and dependable, valued as role models for juniors and for their high training completion rates. Training providers promote, and may adjust the learning environment for, the contribution that adults can make to class cohesion and outcomes. These actions are suggested:

- ✧ more research of adult apprentice impacts on cohorts' training quality and outcomes
- ✧ promoting adult apprentices' beneficial work and classroom influences to industry

Getting adults into the trades: Statistics and research

The major chapter of this report consists of case studies of firms employing adult apprentices in the trades. As a background and a guide to these case studies, this chapter summarises important statistical trends and developments, and examines relevant research.

With recent rapid growth in the training system, the over-25s share of apprenticeships and traineeships generally has jumped from about 5% to about 30% over 1995–2000. In 2000, women occupy about *30%* of all apprenticeships and traineeships.

In the mechanical, automotive, electrical and electronic, and construction trades combined, the statistics indicate that, in 2000, the over-25s age group makes up about 12% of the numbers in training in 2000, up from just over 8% in 1995 (see table 1). As in 1995, women make up only 1% of total numbers in training, but this rises to about 4% among the over-25s group as a whole.

General trends in apprenticeships and traineeships

The most significant shift recently in apprenticeships and traineeships is well known. After a long post-war period of fluctuation and fairly limited growth, Australia's apprenticeship and traineeship system escalated in 1995 and has since more than doubled in size. Shorter (often one year) 'traineeships' in non-trade areas now comprise about half of the total numbers in training. Women now comprise over 30% of the training base, compared with about 5% in 1995.

Certainly, the post-1995 surge was facilitated by the creation of the Australian Traineeship System, but that policy change took place as early as 1985. 'The remarkable surge after 1995 does not appear to have been anticipated widely,' comments Saunders (2001, p.44). 'The existence of traineeships was surely a precondition for growth. Traineeship policy and marketing may have unlocked latent changes in employers' training aspirations and preferences'.

Two significant policy changes, both relevant to this report, occurred only in the 1990s. These were the 1992 removal of age restrictions in apprenticeships (see NCVER 2001d) and the permission for traineeships to be 'embedded' within existing trades areas.

Recent statistical reports (NCVER 1998, 1999a, 1999b) and *Australian apprenticeships* publications (NCVER 2001a, 2001b, 2001c, 2001d) expand on the post-1995 growth patterns.

At 30 June 1995, the total number of contracts of training (NCVER 2001d, p.4), including a mere 12 000 traineeships, was about 136 000. Over the entire period 1975–95, the total had never been lower than 123 000 but had only exceeded 150 000 in the years 1988–92.

Three years later, NCVER (1998) recorded about 195 000 individuals in contracts of training, about 65 000 in traineeships with the remainder in apprenticeships. There had been 123 000 training commencements in 1997–98. Over 50% were aged 20 and older and over 30% were females, major departures from the customary age and sex composition of contract training.

This 1998 report notes the formal abolition, under the new apprenticeships policy banner (see Kemp 1996), of the apprentice–trainee distinction as from January 1998. Given its specific topic,

the present report usually retains the distinction. Important trends for 'apprenticeships' and for the subset of 'traditional trades' are different from those for 'traineeships' and for contracted training generally.

NCVER (1999a) estimates about 134 000 training commencements for the calendar year 1998 and 206 000 in training. The occupational group 'trades and related workers' (Australian Standard Classification of Occupations [ASCO] major group 4) retains over 60% of total numbers in training, but its share of total 1998 commencements is just 32%.

The same report notes that the big five trade groups (mechanical, automotive, electrical, construction and food) have seen little growth in commencements for two to three years. Having had only a very small share of all training in 1995, the non-trade 'intermediate clerical, sales and service' group has grown rapidly, occupying about 32% of commencements and 18% of in-training numbers.

An NCVER overview statistical report makes the important point that,

> *... even though more apprenticeships and traineeships are being taken up by older people, the growth in 15 to 19-year-old participation in apprenticeships and traineeships (over 1995–98) exceeded the growth of this age cohort in the general population. The teenage participation rate in apprenticeships and traineeships is actually growing.* (NCVER 1999b)

By 2000, the NCVER publication, *Australian apprenticeships: Research at a glance* (NCVER 2001d, p.5) is able to boast that Australia is fourth in the world, 'just behind Switzerland, Germany and Austria in terms of coverage of the workforce by the apprenticeship system'. The (new) apprenticeship system is said to be more popular than ever and more reflective of the structure of the labour market, with very good employment outcomes and significant growth potential.

By 30 June 2000, the total number of contracts of training was just over 275 000, up 100% from the figure of 136 000 in 1995. The 'trades and related occupations' occupied just over 50% of all contracts of training, down from 60% in 1998.

By 31 December 2000 (NCVER 2001a), the total numbers had climbed further to 295 000, but the 'trades and related' share of training had dropped to 45%. Females continued to hold more than 30% of training positions, and adults over 25 held 32% of positions.

Training trends in trades and 'traditional' trades

Against a general trend of rapid growth since 1995, the entire 'trades and related' area now occupies only about half of the total numbers in training and a quarter of all training commencements.

As NCVER (2001d) points out, this 50% share is still much higher than the same group's 14% share of employment. By contrast, the 'clerical, sales and service workers' and 'labourers and related' groups have about the same share of new apprenticeships as their share of employment, while the 'associate professionals' share of apprenticeship is well below its share of employment.

While the 'trades and related' group's overall share of training numbers has shrunk considerably, its share of employment has not. The group's share of training dropped from nearly 90% in 1995 to about 50% in 2000, but its share of total Australian employment fell just marginally from 14.5% to 13.6% (NCVER 2001c, table 87). Similarly, the growth trend since 1990 for employment in all trades lies above that employment in all occupations, although construction trades run somewhat against this trend (NCVER & DEWRSB 2001, p.6).

This 'trades and related' area (ASCO 4) includes food trades, agricultural and horticultural workers, and 'other' trades (printing, wood, hairdressing, textile and miscellaneous trades), as well as the core mechanical, auto, electrical and electronic, and construction trades.

The last four trade groups still occupy about 67% of total numbers in training in the 'trades and related' group, just down from the 69% recorded for 1995 (see NCVER 2001b, p.65).

Recent reports, and special extracts of unpublished NCVER statistics, build a picture of trends in these four trade groups, which are the main focus of the present report.

NCVER (2000d) studies the skills supply flowing into significant trade-employing industries such as electricity, building and construction, manufacturing, and retailing—all subjects of case studies in the present report. It is found that the 'trades and related' area has lost a significant training share between the end of 1995 and 1999. Its share of all commencements has dropped from 65% to 28%, of in-training numbers from 85% to 52%, and of completions from 72% to 42%.

Three related reports consider in more detail the recent supply trends in mechanical, auto, and electrical trades. Numbers are found to be fairly stable overall, with the over-25 age group slightly increasing its numbers and its shares of training.

- In mechanical and fabrication trades (ASCO 41), the number of training commencements falls from 6800 to 4760 over 1995–97, recovering to 6130 in 1998 (NCVER 2000c). Numbers in training fall from 19 840 to 18 240, the over-25s share improving from 2010 (10%) to 2110 (12%). There is significant growth in apprenticeships for mechanical engineering technicians.
- In the three main auto trades—mechanics, auto electricians and panel beaters, (ASCO 4211–13)—the number of training commencements falls slightly from 6170 in 1995 to 5610 in 1998 (NCVER 2000a). Total numbers in training fall from 18 320 to 17 450, but the over-25s share improves from 930 (5%) to 1200 (7%). As table 1 shows, the over-25s have a better share of numbers in training for the *overall* auto trades group (ASCO 42).
- In electrical and electronic trades (ASCO 41), the number of training commencements rises from 5150 to 5660 over 1995–98 (NCVER 2000b). Total numbers in training rise from 15 430 to 17 100, the over-25s improving from 1840 (12%) to 2300 (13%).

Table 1 reconsiders and updates these findings from NCVER (2000a, 2000b, 2000c), using unpublished NCVER statistics:

- In the four 'traditional' trade groups under consideration here, numbers in training climb from 82 900 at the end of 1995 to 86 400 at 2000. This improvement is largely due to construction trades, although NCVER and DEWRSB (2001) note that the higher construction commencements are not reflected by higher completions.
- The total number of over-25s climbs from 7000 (8%) to 10 300 (12%) over 1995–2000. The over-25s increase their share in each of the four groups. The increases are from 10% to 12% (mechanical), 6% to 12% (auto), 12% to 15% (electrical), and 7% to 11% (construction). For the four groups together, the increase is from 8% to 12%.
- For the entire 'trades and related' group, which includes food, agricultural and 'other' trades, the over-25s increase their share in a fairly similar manner, from 8% in 1995 to 12% in 1998 and 14% in 2000.

Taking a longer term view, Webster et al. (2001, figure 1, p.189) find significant improvement over some years in adults' shares of training in the 'traditional' trades. The percentage of apprentice commencements over the age of 21 years has risen from 5% or less in 1980–81 to 15% or more (mechanical, electrical and construction) or 10% or more (auto) by 1996–97. This trend analysis of *commencements among over-21s* does not, however, necessarily speak for large increases on the present 12% figure for *in-training numbers among over-25s*.

Table 1: Numbers and percentages in training, by 'traditional' and all trade groups, by age group, December 1995, 1998 and 2000(1)

Trade group	1995	1998	2000
Mechanical and engineering fabrication (ASCO 41):			
Up to 24 in age	17 924	17 782	14 802
25 and over	2 014 (10%)	2 434 (12%)	2 073 (12%)
Total	**19 938**	**20 216**	**16 875**
Automotive (ASCO 42):			
Up to 24 in age	20 119	20 522	20 585
25 and over	1 321 (6%)	3 025 (13%)	2 672 (12%)
Total	**21 440**	**23 547**	**23 257**
Electrical and electronics (ASCO 43):			
Up to 24 in age	13 619	13 667	13 786
25 and over	1 830 (12%)	2 192 (14%)	2 341 (15%)
Total	**15 449**	**15 859**	**16 127**
Construction (ASCO 44):			
Up to 24 in age	24 313	22 485	26 958
25 and over	1 798 (7%)	2 169 (9%)	3 176 (11%)
Total	**26 111**	**24 654**	**30 134**
All 'traditional' trade groups (ASCO 41–44):			
Up to 24 in age	75 975	74 456	76 131
25 and over	6 963 (8%)	9 820 (12%)	10 262 (12%)
Total	**82 938**	**84 276**	**86 393**
All 'trades and related' groups (ASCO 41–49):(2)			
Up to 24 in age	111 110	109 390	113 056
25 and over	9 675 (8%)	15 402 (12%)	17 995 (14%)
Total	**120 785**	**124 792**	**131 051**

Source: Unpublished NCVER apprenticeship and traineeship statistics

Notes: (1) The great majority of the numbers are 'trade' rather than 'traineeships' in nature, i.e. AQF 3 or higher (unpublished NCVER statistics). Numbers are at 31 December each year

(2) Including food trades (ASCO 45), skilled agricultural and horticultural (ASCO 46), and 'other' (ASCO 49, printing, wood, hairdressing, textile and miscellaneous) trades

Other unpublished NCVER statistics can be used to show that, in the 'traditional' trades, contracts of training are overwhelmingly concentrated in full-time as opposed to part-time jobs, in the private sector or group training schemes as opposed to government, and with men rather than with women.

While group training has generally been in the business of trades rather than traineeships, this is becoming less so over time. 'Trades and related occupations' now occupy (see NCVER 2001e) a little over 60% of all group training contracts in 2000, down from nearly 90% of group training contracts in 1995. The 60% figure is moving closer to the all-contracts figure of 50% that is cited above for the year 2000.

Females occupy over 30% of all contracts of training at 2000 (NCVER 2001b, p.86). However, their share is only 13% in the 'trades and related' group, just up from 12% in 1995 (NCVER 2001c, table 101).

In the 'traditional' trades group of this report, which excludes the female-dominated hairdressing trades, the position of females and adult women is negligible. It has not shifted despite having been a substantial Commonwealth policy agenda over a number of years. At table 2, women represent only 1100 (1.3%) of 86 400 in training in mechanical, auto, electrical and construction trades, or 370 (3.6%) of the 10 300 in training aged 25 or more.

While the training system is 'increasingly open to females and people of all ages' (NCVER 2001b, p.89), this is not so in the traditional trades. The resounding success with 'women in new apprenticeships' since 1995 overshadows persistent failure with 'women in trades' over a longer period. Interestingly, 'women in trades' is not highlighted as a performance reporting issue in

current national reporting (see ANTA 2000b) or the recent *Australian apprenticeships* and *Women in VET* publications (NCVER 2001a, 2001b, 2001c, 2001d, 2000e).

Table 2: Numbers and percentages in training for 'traditional' trades, by age group by sex, December 1995 and 2000(1)

Trade group	1995			2000		
All 'traditional' trade groups (ASCO 41–44):	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Up to 24 in age	75 135	840 (1.1%)	75 975	75 363	768 (1%)	76 131
25 and over	6 728	235 (3.4%)	6 963	9 895	367 (3.6%)	10 262
Total	**81 863**	**1 075 (1.3%)**	**82 938**	**85 258**	**1 135 (1.3%)**	**86 393**

Source: Unpublished NCVER apprenticeship and traineeship statistics, at 31 December each year

Note: (1) The great majority of the numbers are 'trade' rather than 'traineeships' in nature, i.e. AQF 3 or higher (unpublished NCVER statistics). Numbers are at 31 December each year

NCVER (2001b, table 45, p.109) points out that the 'trades and related' area is holding its own in terms of numbers of completions, although its share of total training completions may have fallen sharply. The number of completions has risen from 23 400 in 1994–95 to 25 700 in 1999–2000 and the trend since then is further upwards.

The numbers in 'trades and related' training have grown (NCVER 2001b, p.173) from about 120 000 in mid-1995 to 140 000 in mid-2000. Within that, the report sees room for further growth in the 'traditional' trades. Significantly, in 2000, a number of these trades have less than 10% of their workforce in the form of apprentices, or they continue to feature in official national skill shortage lists.

The statistics confirm that, contrary to some expectations, the traditional trades have held their own in the 1990s. They continue to form and reform themselves as an important set of skills for the contemporary Australian economy and their replenishment (including the contributions made by adults) is vital.

Research pointers on adults in the 'traditional' trades

In itself, 'adults in the traditional trades' could not be said to be a prime topic for vocational education and training (VET) research.

However, a number of recent VET and apprenticeships research studies and reports offer insights into the training demand-and-supply issues that may impact on the position of adults in the trades, and the prospects for improvement of that position.

These studies and reports have formed a general background to the framing of the present report's case studies and questions, as well as the interpretations of the responses.

Training policy and system issues

Training for real jobs (Kemp 1996) is a landmark for the current system for 'new apprenticeships'. Taking up the smallish traineeship system as it then was, and absorbing 1994 recommendations in favour of a training market, this ministerial statement recommended an industry-led training system, with apprenticeships and traineeships going beyond the traditional occupations, more money for VET-in-Schools programs, 'user choice' of training providers, redirection of training incentives, and the improvement of regional training services (that is, the current new apprenticeships centres).

The new apprenticeships system took formal effect from 1998, as did the Australian Recognition Framework (ARF). Under this framework, the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) began to endorse training packages, whereby industry training advisory bodies (ITABs) develop

qualifications, competencies and assessment guidelines for industries and occupations. ANTA has presided over a considerable increase in Commonwealth and State funding for VET since its formation in 1992.

All of the 'traditional' trades considered in this report are now covered by established training packages (although only some apprentices are actually trained using these packages). The most relevant packages are those for the metal and engineering, automotive, electrotechnology, general construction, aeroskills, and telecommunications, industries.

In 1999, Mitchell et al. reviewed the current state of legislation for the VET sector, post-ARF and new apprenticeships. While they find that VET law is broadly supportive of national policy, the legislation is seen to lag behind the training flexibility embodied in new apprenticeships. Compared with the 'integrated' Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) ladder, there are seen to be patchy or divergent legal provisions for trades, traineeships, 'declared vocations', and structured (that is, non-apprenticeship) work placements. An ANTA (2000a, p.54) report urges continuing legislative reform to diversify the pathways for apprenticeships and traineeships.

The current interest in 'adults in trades' could be said to arise from research by NCVER and other organisations about the state of the labour market and the state of the trades labour markets, rather than specific prescriptions to be found in VET policy or performance measurement.

As noted above, one major concern is that the trades are replenishing their workforces at too low a rate to address perennial skill shortages. The ageing of the population is a key reason cited for giving greater attention to adults in trades. 'The proportion of the population aged under 25 will fall from 35% today to only 30% by 2020', argues NCVER (2001b, pp.179–80). 'There is no choice but to continue with the recruitment of older people into Australian apprenticeships'.

The national strategy for VET (ANTA 1998) gives tacit support to (increasing) adult (skill or trade) training, in terms of its vision for lifelong updating of workers' skills and its first objective of 'equipping Australians for the world at work'.

Trade training issues, and adult trade training issues, including women in trades, have not featured prominently in the national priorities set annually as an accompaniment to the national strategy, nor in the *Annual national reports* (see ANTA 2000b) that follow up on its performance.

The perception may be that adult interests are served well enough by the rapid expansion of adult traineeships since 1995, which is well documented in ANTA (2000b). It could be argued that the priorities should continue to rest with 'younger' adults, in a situation where the *Annual national report* notes continuing under-performance on the 'Finn' target for 22-year-olds (that 60% should be in or have completed a substantial VET or university program). The report (ANTA 2000b, p.56) does, however, note that 're-skilling of older workers will become increasingly important' due to the ageing of the Australian workforce.

In discussing Queensland trends, Smith (1998) contends that the increasing proportions of adult (over age 25) apprentices and trainees are *not* reflective of Queensland Government priorities. Schofield (1999) makes a similar point, although her concern is more with the upward age creep of traineeships than apprenticeships.

Training cost and training wage issues

An important consideration relating to the opportunities available to adult apprentices (who may be perceived as 'more costly' to train) is the manner in which training costs are or should be shared between the firm, the apprentice, and government.

Relevant here is the rise over the late 1990s of the public training market and its 'user choice' provisions. These provisions open up some of the public VET funding for competition, although

the majority technical and further education (TAFE) provider still retains about 75–80% of the total market.

Saunders (2001) summarises recent studies on the training market and user choice, noting the reservations that have been expressed about these concepts and the extent of their impact on training efficiencies and employer training costs. Billett and Cooper (1998) imply that trade-intensive industries, such as metals and construction, will tend to have better access to public VET funding, by virtue of having recognised apprenticeships and traineeships in their workforces, and thus may be inclined to invest less in training (and training innovation) than emerging industries.

Several recent studies highlight the general benefits of private training investment by Australian firms. As summarised by the Rural Industry Working Group (RIWG 2001), these benefits include positive and high returns on training investment, a range of returns (more labour productivity, value-adding, multi-skilling or innovation), greater training pay-offs from training for specific business needs, and spin-offs from training when firms need to pursue other management changes.

In the particular field of trade training, and especially in the traditional trades, apprenticeship is classically held to be a 'net cost' to the firm, at least over the life of the indenture. The research does not give clear pointers on the different costs or durations of adult training.

Dockery et al. (2001) estimate an average net cost of $38 000 over four years. A study by the Regional Economic Research Unit and Group for Research in Employment and Training (RERU–GREAT 1998) offers similar or higher figures. Costs are found to be higher in 'traditional' trades than in food and hairdressing trades, and in all trades high in the first year but shifting to a small net benefit by year four. The cost for the first training year is large, compared with available (see below) employer incentives. Over 50% of the total four-year cost is said to fall to the firm, with more of the remainder falling to the apprentice than it does to government.

Employers are said to perceive a net training benefit (Dockery et al. 2001), or to discount high training costs in favour of social and community motives for training (RERU–GREAT 1998). Possibly, employers are unconsciously factoring in benefits that will accrue if apprentices stay on past the formal apprenticeship term, as many adult apprentices are indeed inclined to do.

Also significant in the training costs equation are various forms of training levy and training incentive that may be offered from time to time by the Commonwealth or State Governments.

The recent Commonwealth venture into training levies was short-lived (1990–94). As Ray (2001, p.27) notes, training incentives for employers have proved to be much more durable, since their modest introduction in 1977 in the form of the Commonwealth Rebate for Apprentice Full-time Training (CRAFT). Today's version of CRAFT, the Commonwealth New Apprenticeships Incentives Programme (DETYA 2001), expends close to $400 million a year. The same levels of employer benefits attach to adult apprentices, although in practice an adult will be more likely to be ruled out by virtue of possessing an existing qualification.

As summarised in Saunders (2001), various studies query the impact of employer incentives on apprentice recruitment, or endorse incentive funding for existing employees under some circumstances, or suggest that government training incentives should take the form of 'levers' for private investment rather than direct per capita subsidies for each apprentice or trainee. The drift of these studies is to question whether the costs of apprentice training should be moved further away from firms and government towards apprentices, particularly by reducing apprentice wages.

One of the few recent empirical studies of employer incentives, that of the Centre for Labour Market Research (CLMR 1997), finds that they have a positive impact, but that a relatively large increase in incentives is required to induce additional enterprise training. At that time, the Commonwealth was floating but later discarded a proposal to withdraw the incentives from 'large' employers (100 employees or more).

Whereas Hawke and Wooden (1997) summarise the Australian shift from centrally determined awards to enterprise bargaining, Guthrie and Barnett (1996) find that relatively few enterprise bargaining agreements of the time really deal with the structured training dimension of workplace relations. Jenkins (1999) later makes a similar comment from the metals and manufacturing (Australian Industry Group) perspective.

Examining the effects of award restructuring, Webster et al. (2001) point to persistent evidence of large numbers of qualified tradespeople doing non-trade work, at the same time as large numbers of unqualified people are doing trade work. To some extent, they argue, employers appear to be upgrading (unqualified) workers rather than bidding up (trade) wages, and this situation may be caused by some jobs not really requiring qualified tradespeople. Some, but not all, trade-related awards prescribe higher rates for adult apprentices.

On average, trade wages are distinctly lower than those for university graduates. NCVER (2001b, chapter 8) contends that trades and skilled vocational graduates are the 'next best paid' group after university graduates, commanding a large (71%) premium on average wages received by those with no post-school qualifications at all. In the core metal, electrical and building trades, the premium escalates further if the tradesperson also possesses a higher level diploma or degree qualification.

Training pathway and delivery issues

'Traditional' apprenticeships may be characterised (NCVER 2001b, chapter 5) as a form of training having a contract of four years, a structured program with four days on the job and one day off (or equivalent in longer blocks), and an outcome of a trade certificate at level III under the new Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF).

By contrast, 'new' apprenticeships are offered across the labour market spectrum, lead to a full range of AQF qualifications, are flexible in length, offer choices of training provider and of undertaking all training on the job, and include options for school-based apprenticeships.

The NCVER report notes the emergence of part-time apprenticeships, the growth of school-based apprenticeships, the decline of public service apprenticeships and the resurgence of on-the-job training. These trends apply, if less intensively, to the traditional trades.

The report is correctly (rather than critically) making the point that training for the 'traditional' trades tends to be more prescriptive in its application than is new apprenticeship training generally. An important question here is the extent to which adult apprentices are receiving, or ought to receive, a similar prescription. Several recent reports are relevant to the development of new pathways, and possible adult pathways, in the trades.

Writing at an early stage of the post-1995 traineeship surge, and influenced by increasing cross-skilling in the trades, Malley (1997) considers alternative and more flexible 'two-stage' delivery models for entry-level training and new apprenticeships. The models include institutionally based training, traineeship-type training, and school–TAFE partnerships.

A later report (ANTA 2000a), commissioned to examine the extent to which training packages have encouraged flexible pathways into trades, finds some examples of these pathways occurring in practice.

The audit of training packages underpinning the ANTA report gives the impression that the packages have been fitted into the trades, rather than the other way around. The alternative pathways that are found do not appear to be affecting large numbers of apprentices or adult apprentices. They are said to be 'restricted and not common' in core metal and electrical trades, but 'more fluid' in automotive, construction, telecommunications and printing.

In the first group, the new pathways tend to involve minor variations on the conventional apprenticeship track, such as VET-in-Schools, school-based apprenticeships, and traineeships

within trades. While, in theory, post-1998 training packages (and State legislation) embrace all types of pathways to the trade-related qualifications, the reality is that non-apprenticeship pathways are uncommon under present industrial conditions.

The apprenticeship-type pathways that are found in the first group also occur in the second group, but they are accompanied by less conventional options that lie outside the apprenticeship track. These may include institutional training models, even up to certificate or diploma level, and front-end institutional training followed by industry work placements, not always within a formal apprenticeship.

The ANTA report finds that new pathways can be triggered by a variety of demand-and-supply factors, including skill shortages, structural change, particular high-skill needs, responses to new market opportunities, pushes to improve regional access to training, and improvements in training access for less customary supply groups (including adults).

Various blockages may impede new trade pathways. Some are particularly relevant to adult apprenticeships. These include State legislation that gives insufficient recognition to competency-based progression and post-trade articulation; VET funding gaps; lack of helpful award variations; poor availability of structured work placements; quality, assessment and articulation issues; inadequate trainer development in TAFE and industry; and under-rating of trade skills. Most trades are rated as certificate III, although a few are certificate IV.

A number of actions are suggested that might help overcome the blockages. These include promoting new pathways; a 'consistent and systematic approach' to the development of packages, pathways and attendant award variations; reconfiguration of employer incentives more in favour of newer and post-trade pathways; support for industry-specific new apprenticeships centres; and faster legislative reform.

To keep these 'blockages' in perspective, the ANTA report does make the point that non-apprenticeship pathways can lead to trade-type skill outcomes, and thereby help to overcome 'shortages' of such skills.

In electrical and electronic trades (see Electrotechnology Working Group 2000) and again in construction trades (NCVER & DEWRSB 2001), the numbers of VET enrolments in non-apprenticeship pathways to skills are estimated to be as high as those in apprenticeships. Especially in construction, with a high proportion historically of unqualified trade workers, students completing such pathways are quite likely to be employed or paid at trade levels.

Surveying metal, electrical and building trade employers, KPMG Management Consultants (1998) comments on the adverse impact of 'labour hire' firms on the core commitment of employers to apprentice training. The National Electrical Contractors' Association (NECA 1998) expresses concern at declines in electrical and electronics apprenticeships, suggesting, among other things, greater in-school promotion of technical careers and simpler mature-age entry to trades. The later Electrotechnology Working Group (2000) report and related NECA (2001) pamphlet on the same trades recommend more work on alternative pathways to trades, on electrotechnology projects within group schemes, and towards specific incentives and employer subsidies for emerging skill areas.

Hall et al. (2000) interviewed Australian employers and educators in metals and engineering industries, which are seen to need an increasingly responsive training system in the face of globalisation. Employers, they find, lack knowledge of the apparatus of training packages, including training pathways and competency-based training, and are tending to recruit rather than train. They are reluctant to make use of the Engineering Production Certificate, a traineeship-within-trade pathway that could be used by adult production workers.

Webster et al. (2001) are strongly critical of the training system's responsiveness to adult training needs, particularly in relation to pathways for unqualified, or underqualified, experienced adult workers in trades and related semi-trade jobs. New pathways, they contend, are not co-ordinated,

not rewarded in registered training organisations, not well provided for in training information and marketing, and not seriously collected in the training data.

Summing up, Saunders (2001, p.55) contends that overall progress on innovative training pathways over the 1990s is only 'moderate', although school-based programs are the shining exception. He summarises here the changing roles of training intermediaries (industry training advisory bodies, group training companies, and new apprenticeships centres) in developing training solutions and pathways for particular industries and employer types.

Training quality and attrition

The quality of training available, particularly the quality of training providers, industry trainers, and training delivery mechanisms, may have a significant impact on the opportunities available for adult apprentices. Adults may benefit from different or more flexible delivery approaches if they are to survive the apprenticeship period and achieve the best skill and qualification outcomes.

The sheer magnitude of the traineeship surge since 1995 has led to quality concerns and State policy reviews (Schofield 1999, 2000). By contrast, there is sometimes an implicit assumption that trade training will be superior in quality to non-trade pathways or traineeship training.

A few researchers (Curtain 1996; Smith 1998) are critical of trade-training quality in terms of its occupational narrowness, or the ad hoc nature of competency acquisition and apprentice supervision. Two years into the full implementation of training packages and competency-based training, the ANTA (2000a) report raises some concerns about training assessment and trainer quality in the trades.

Considerable attention has also been devoted to the question of attrition or wastage rates as an indicator of trade training quality, perhaps at the expense of a more critical focus on matters of the quality and modernity of training infrastructure, pathways and delivery.

NCVER (2001b), citing the estimation techniques of Ray et al. (2000), asserts that 70% or more of trade (as opposed to traineeship) apprentices complete training, which compares quite favourably to equivalent completion percentages for university and other VET students.

Tracking individual Queensland apprentices from the 1994–95 cohort, Smith (2000) finds much lower completion rates in the trades. He is not convinced that his State is worse off than others. As it happens, the later Cully and Curtain (2001, p.6) analysis suggests it is better off than most in the case of trades, but not traineeships.

Corroborating Smith's point that little of the wastage occurs in the apprentice probationary period, Callan's (2000) Queensland study contends that surviving the apprenticeship is associated with the development of quality workplace relationships as well as quality training. His statistical evidence is that trainee non-completion is more common among the younger age groups, whereas with apprentices there is not much difference in completion rates between those aged under 25 on commencement, and those 25 and over.

The Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education Committee (2000) regards non-completion as a significant wastage. Following Callan, the committee perceives poor-quality training in terms of on-the-job factors (access to trainers and staff, quality of peer support) as much as off-the-job factors.

The Cully and Curtain (2001) report, prompted by rising ANTA concerns over apprentice and trainee non-completions, is a recent major survey of the issues. Their behavioural analysis tends to defuse the non-completion and age-related non-completion issues for apprentices, if not for trainees. They find that non-completion falls considerably with increasing age for the apprentices surveyed, but not for the trainees. For those aged 25 or more, only 6% of the non-completers are apprentices and the rest are trainees. Apprentices aged 25 and more are a little more likely than

their younger colleagues to state that (where it occurs) non-completion was employer initiated and a little less likely to attribute it to job-related or personal factors.

Apprentice non-completers are found to have fairly similar employment outcomes to trainee non-completers, 47% being with the same employer or in a better job compared with 58% of trainees. The older the non-completers are, the more likely they are to stay with the same employer and the less likely they are to achieve a better job.

However, apprentice non-completers have considerably different training outcomes, 44% having recommenced training compared to only 11% of the trainees. The recommencement effect for apprentices, however, declines with increasing age. Twenty-seven percent of the 18–20-year-olds have recommenced, compared with 17% of those aged 21 to 24 and 7% of the group aged 25 and over.

Trainees, the report comments, are more inclined than apprentices to be relatively uninformed about training and to discount the value of the training and the qualification.

Offering suggestions to reduce non-completion, the report canvasses improving the fit between new apprentices and employers, improving the in-work experience, and providing better assistance for *older* new apprentices. The system is said (p.36) to be 'strongly oriented to the learning styles and operational needs of young people. Adult apprentices continue to face barriers to entry in the male-dominated traditional trades'.

On the completion side of the ledger, Harris et al. (2001) identify, from a literature survey, ten positive factors for training completion. These are: the apprentice or trainee's personal commitment; the support network; a good initial placement; related work experience beforehand; good supervisors; the workplace culture, real training opportunities; reliable transport to work; flexible career paths; and the value placed on the qualification.

Harris et al. (p.233) go on to develop a useful model for the process of retention, which seems to be applicable to the behaviour and outcomes for apprentices and adult apprentices in the trades. The significant point is that their model combines the three factors of personal attributes, labour market factors, and training quality, to explain good training outcomes.

Supply-and-demand issues

Jenkins (1999) lists the Australian Industry Group (AIG) concerns with the training system as continuing system complexity, 'low' apprenticeship commencements, skill shortages (for top class tradespersons), and potential erosion of Australia's skill base advantage.

Employers may be more or less likely to engage adult apprentices in the traditional trades according to the extent to which they see such apprentices as contributing to the company's quality, skill base, productivity, profitability, and the alleviation of skill shortages.

As mentioned above, there is an increasing literature on the skill, profitability and business development spin-offs to the firm from training. Less in evidence are comparative analyses of the value to the firm of trade versus non-trade, or adult versus junior, training in alleviating skill shortages.

The generally low rates of apprenticeship commencement and completion over time form one of the most important single arguments for greater consideration of adult apprentices as another important supply source that could assist in gradually boosting training numbers.

Saunders (2001, p.45) notes that a number of the trades listed (DEWRSB 2000) as being in national skill shortage are 'perennials' that also appear in the equivalent list of 1987. The 'traditional' trades have had low and declining rates of training, or rates of replenishment, over time. The annual replenishment rate through formal apprenticeships was down to about 2% by 1995, with a similar rate in 2000 (see table 3).

Recent strategic reports are available on supply–demand issues and skill shortages for the four key trade groups under consideration in the present report.

In 1999, the Commonwealth Minister responsible for VET established (see RIWG 2001, p.11) the National Industry Skills Initiative (or Forum) to determine what steps industry and government could take to address industry skill shortages.

The first three industries reported on were engineering (AIG 2000), electrotechnology (Electrotechnology Working Group 2000), and retail automotive trades (VACC 2000). The first two reports tend to emphasise actual skill shortages in key trades more than the third.

The Skills Initiative has listed 12 themes common to the skill solutions proposed in these first three reports. These relate to: the adoption of the learning culture; improving the industry image; promoting careers; reviewing the activities of new apprenticeships centres; promoting new training pathways; recognising prior learning (RPL); retraining the workforce; improving workplace relations; streamlining regulatory frameworks; reviewing employer incentives; migration issues; and boosting industry information and analysis. A few of these themes (particularly new pathways, RPL and retraining) are significant for adult training.

A later report (NCVER & DEWRSB 2001) deals with skill shortages in the building trades, the fourth key group under consideration here. Although, as noted in the statistical discussion above, there has been a steady increase in training numbers since 1995, this is not leading to increases in completions. Following Webster et al. (2001), the report notes that these trades exhibit high proportions of qualified people working out of trade coexisting with similar proportions (40% or more) of unqualified people working in trade.

The report calls for opportunities for (post-trade) up-skilling into supervision and management. It is argued that, as low apprentice completions may continue, emerging skilled job vacancies may need to be sourced from non-apprentice pathways, from re-entry of qualified workers, or through migration.

Table 3: Apprenticeship completions (C), trade workforces (W) and rates of training (R) in 'traditional' trades, 1986(1), 1995 and 2000

Trade group	1986(1)			1995			2000		
	C ('000)	W ('000)	R(2) (%)	C ('000)	W ('000)	R (%)	C ('000)	W ('000)	R (%)
Mechanical trades (ASCO 41)	12+(3)	250+(3)	5%(3)	4.65	206	2.3%	5.05	206	2.5%
Automotive trades (ASCO 42)				3.65	138	2.6%	4.85	145	3.3%
Electrical and electronics trades (ASCO 43)	6.5+	120+	5–6%	3.65	180	2.0%	3.50	195	1.8%
Construction trades (ASCO 44)	6+	175+	3–4%	4.25	261	1.6%	4.45	290	1.5%
All 'traditional' trades	24+	545+	4–5%(1)	16.2	785	2.1%	17.9	835	2.1%

Sources: For 1986, DEIR (1986). For 1995 and 2000, unpublished NCVER statistics for completions of apprenticeships and DEWRSB (2000) for employed workforce

Notes:
(1) 1986 was a peak year for apprenticeship completions, not exceeded again till 1993. The equivalent rate R for 1987 is lower, of the order of 3–3.5%
(2) Formal apprenticeship completions, divided by workforce, as a percentage. Does not count other forms of VET course or informal skilling that may contribute to the trade workforce, especially in construction
(3) First three figures across this row for 1986 are for mechanical and auto trades *combined*

Summary

In the 1990s, the dramatic shift in Australia's training system has been the growth surge in traineeships. Traineeships have come to occupy half of all contracts of training. From mid–1995 to mid-2000, the overall number of 'new apprenticeships' has doubled to about 275 000, and the general profile of training has shifted much more towards adults and women.

Within this, the trades can be said to be holding their own, certainly in training numbers and to a very great extent in their shares of the workforce. Between mid-1995 and 2000, the numbers in training in the whole 'trades and related' group moved from 120 000 up to 140 000 and annual training completions increased from about 23 000 to 26 000 and more.

The 'traditional' trades that are the main focus of this report comprise about two-thirds of all training in the whole trades group. Their numbers in training have increased a little, from about 83 000 at the end of 1995 to 86 000 at the end of 2000. Some of these trades show continuing signs of under-replenishment or labour market shortage, indicating room for further growth.

For the over-25s, the share of training in the 'traditional' trades has climbed from 8% in 1995 to 12% in 2000, following much the same pattern as for the whole trades group. The system of training for 'traditional' trades is still 'strongly oriented to the needs of young people,' comment Cully and Curtain (2001). 'Adult apprentices continue to face barriers to entry'. The share of 'traditional' trade training held by women is static on 1% in 2000, as compared to 13% for the whole trades group.

The new apprenticeships system and the Australian Recognition Framework have been implemented from 1998. New or revised concepts and programs, such as VET-in-Schools, 'user choice' of training providers, new apprenticeships centres, training packages and competency-based training, impact on trade training and its accessibility to adults.

The current interest in 'adults in trades' appears to arise from general observations about the ageing of the population and supply and demand in the trades, rather than specific prescriptions for adult training to be found in national VET policies. There are views that young people should maintain some of their historical position of priority in apprenticeships and traineeships.

Traditional trade training is held to be a high net cost to the firm, but employers appear to discount this in favour of post-trade expectations and social commitments to training. The cost–benefit equation tends to shift to a benefit for the firm in year four of the indenture.

The firm is estimated to pick up more than half of the cost of apprentice training, a large proportion of the remainder falling to the apprentice rather than to government. Studies query the sense of shifting training costs further towards trade apprentices. At the margin, the employer incentives program offsets costs to employers, but there is no extra offset for adults. While employers must carry 'high' rates that are prescribed for adult apprentices in some awards, and qualified trade wages are 'high' relative to those for unqualified adults, adults with trade and skilled vocational qualifications earn less than university graduates.

Training for the 'traditional' trades remains more prescriptive in its application than that for other 'new apprenticeships'. A recent ANTA report documents the cautious application of alternative pathways to the traditional trade occupations. This and other recent reports suggest actions to unblock skill pathways and skill shortages. These include more consistent approaches in training packages to training pathways and attendant award variations, reconfiguration of new apprenticeships centres or employer incentives, incentives for emerging skill areas, or simpler mature-age entry procedures. Non-trade pathways to trade-type skills are significant in electrical and construction, and can alleviate skill shortages.

Wastage from trade training remains a concern, but a major sample survey (Cully & Curtain 2001) suggests that the risk of apprentice (not trainee) non-completion falls away for those aged 25 or more. A significant percentage of apprentice, unlike trainee, non-completers recommence training elsewhere.

Annual replenishment rates in the 'traditional' trades have only been about 2% over the past five years. If it is taken that adult apprentices are more likely to complete training, then they are a potentially valuable alternative supply pool to help alleviate perennial labour shortages.

Recent National Industry Skills Initiative reports on skill shortages in metal, electrical and auto trades give some prominence to adult training issues in the common themes and solutions identified. A 2001 (NCVER & DEWRSB) report on the building trades calls for greater post-trade (for adults) and non-apprenticeship skilling opportunities to address skill shortages.

Getting adults into the trades: The case studies

This report studies firms' approaches to encouraging and accommodating adult (especially aged over 25) apprentices in the traditional trades. The two major components of the report are an examination of the statistical and research evidence and case studies of firms employing adults in trades. This chapter summarises the results of the case studies.

The first section of this chapter explains how the 16 case-study firms were selected and summarises their industry and apprenticeship profiles. The other sections discuss in some detail the comparative results of the case studies. For purposes of comparison, the case studies are examined in terms of companies' management of training, recruitment and selection processes, attitudes to training intermediaries and incentives, costs and wages for (adult) apprentices, training delivery and pathways, and training approaches to, and future expectations for, the over-25s. Also summarised are the views of company training providers and a sample of the adult apprentices themselves.

Background to case studies

This section explains the rationale for the selection of the firms studied, outlines the methodology, and summarises the industry and trade details for the firms that responded.

Selection of case studies

There being a relatively small amount of available and relevant research on adult apprenticeship characteristics and trends, the starting point for the case studies was to concentrate on known employers of adult apprentices. That is to say, no control group methodology was adopted in the study. Firms that did employ adult apprentices (or trained them well) were not compared with those that didn't (or perhaps didn't train them so well).

The expectation was that there would be substantial variation in training practices and views among firms that did employ adult apprentices. There would also be a substantial amount to be learnt from them in terms of how well the system was or was not working.

The firms chosen were 'flagship' companies with some known degree of commitment over time to adult apprenticeships, although this does not necessarily imply higher-than-average adult shares of apprenticeships. The rationale was that the issues these companies generated could also be assumed to apply to other companies with less commitment to adult training.

From this starting point, there was a search for up to 20 'reasonably representative' companies employing adult apprentices in traditional trades. The traditional trades were taken as mechanical, auto, electrical and construction, four of the five biggest trade groups.

Food trades, the fifth group, was not included, to keep the research compact, but also because 'traditional' trade occupations are less prevalent in this group. Similarly, agricultural and 'other' trades were not included, apart from one printing firm.

'Representative' was taken to mean that the companies chosen would be employers of adult apprentices in several different States, covering a variety of large and small firms, and a range of the traditional trades. To balance the case studies, the views of training providers and apprentices would be sought along with those of employers.

To assist in this regard, State training agencies (New South Wales, Queensland and Tasmania) offered access to adult apprenticeship records that would lead to likely employers. To these data bases were added leads from employers, employer bodies, training providers, training documents and websites, and other local knowledge.

In this way, about 30 firms were approached nationally. A version of the question sheet used is in the appendix. Generally speaking, companies were given a reasonably open hand to talk about factors that might or might not encourage them to take on adult apprentices.

Sixteen of the 30 firms participated, a 50% response rate. The firms that did not participate appeared to be fairly similar in their industry and size dispersion to the firms that did. They included five or six group training firms, five manufacturers, two electricity firms and two transport firms. Where given, reasons for non-participation usually related to the pressure of business or the response burden, but sometimes it was a simple absence of adult apprentices.

Case studies were conducted in the second half of 2001. All States and the ACT were represented, a variety of large and small firms and group training schemes was surveyed, and the four major groups of traditional trades were well-represented. On average, the companies were also fairly representative (see below) of the national situation, in terms of the shares of their apprenticeships held by those aged 25 and over.

The case studies are summarised and interpreted in this report. They also appear in full in the supplementary NCVER website publication *Getting adults into the trades: Case studies*, which is available at www.ncver.edu.au

The firms surveyed

Table 4 displays the basic details for the 16 firms surveyed in the case studies. Two to three firms were surveyed in each State and Territory, except for Tasmania (1) and Northern Territory (0). The most common industries of the firms surveyed were group training schemes (5), manufacturing (5), electricity supply (2) and retail automotive (2).

Leaving aside the five group schemes, three of the eleven firms had more than 1000 employees, four had 1000–500, three 500–100, and one 100 or less. Of these 11 firms, one carried more than 500 tradespersons, three carried 500–100 and seven carried less than 100.

Of the 16 firms and group schemes together, one carried more than 500 apprentices, five carried 500–100, and ten carried less than 100. Only six firms carried 10 or more adult (over 25) apprentices, with the other ten firms carrying less than ten. The total number of apprentices in the over-25 age group represented in table 4 is about 125 (7%), but at least twice this number would be over 21.

In other words, the average share of the over-25 age group in the surveyed companies' apprenticeships was actually below the national average of 12% for the traditional trades. In five companies, however, the over-25s' share of apprenticeships was between 20% and 50%.

Only five companies mentioned women apprentices, and only one pointed to a specific recruitment strategy for adult women. The total number of female apprentices in the survey would only appear to be about a dozen, less than 1% of the over 1800 apprentices in total.

The firms surveyed most commonly employed electrical, or metal and electrical, trades (eight firms). Other trades covered were construction, auto, aeronautical, printing, and 'various'.

The employers in table 4 are reasonably representative of the trade training mix in the general workforce, noting some over-representation of construction trades relative to others and group training schemes relative to ordinary employers of apprentices.

Table 4: Employers of adult apprentices in the case studies, by State, industry and 'traditional' trade characteristics, 2001

Employer	State	Industry	Employee numbers	Trades, apprentice, and adult apprentice, numbers(1)	Trade types
Crane Copper Tube	NSW	manufacturing	340	40, 17, 4	metal, elec.
'Auto component firm'	Vic	manufacturing	2000	200, 60, 5(3)	metal, elec.
MEGT	Vic	group training	n/a	n/a, 400, 9(3)	various
Flight West (4)	Qld	air transport	250	45, 15, 3(3)	aeronautical
BIGA	Qld	group training	n/a	n/a, 550, 40	construction
Hamersley Iron	WA	mining	2200	850, 100, 5	metal, elec.
Wesfarmers CSBP	WA	manufacturing	570	40, 9, 1	metal, elec.
Westpower	WA	electricity	300	60, 21, 7(2)	electrical
Electrolux	SA	manufacturing	1500	50, 18, 8(3)	elec. metal
Griffin Press	SA	manufacturing	160	20, 15, 5-6(3)	printing (5)
MTA Group Training	SA	group training	n/a	n/a, 330, 12(2)	automotive
Elwick Rd Bodyworks	Tas	retail (auto r'pr)	7	3, 2, 1	automotive
ActewAGL	ACT	electricity	800	250, 40, 2(3)	electrical
ACT MBA GpTraining	ACT	group training	n/a	n/a, 100, 10(3)	construction
ACT Electro Group	ACT	group training	n/a	n/a, 75, 12(3)	electrical

Notes:
(1) 'Adult' generally refers to those aged 25 and over, unless otherwise indicated
(2) 'Adult' refers here to those aged 21 and over
(3) These companies are known to have at least twice as many adult apprentices in the 21-plus age bracket as are indicated (by the third figure of this column) for the 25-plus bracket alone. A complete count of the over-21s was not, however, attempted
(4) Employment and training numbers since affected by the Ansett Airlines collapse
(5) Printing is not in the four trade groups that are the statistical core of this report. However, qualitatively speaking, it may be regarded as a traditional-type trade and, quantitatively speaking, the numbers here are not large compared with those represented by the other 15 firms

There is a reasonable balance in terms of the distribution across the chosen four main 'traditional' trade groups: mechanical, automotive, electrical and construction. According to NCVER (2001b, table 22, p.65), the total numbers of apprentices in these four groups are in the proportions 20%, 26%, 20% and 33%. In table 3, which represents a total of about 1800 apprentices, the proportions are (up to) 15%, (up to) 25%, (up to) 15% and (up to) 50%. The over-representation in construction arises from the inclusion of one large group scheme.

About half of the apprentices surveyed are employed with group schemes and half in private sector firms. This exceeds group training's overall share of traditional trade training.

Employers' training perspectives

The survey of firms (see appendix) was designed to elicit a general picture of the manner in which firms conduct training, and especially training for adults and the over-25s. This includes aspects such as:

- ✧ firm size, numbers of tradespersons, apprentices and adult apprentices (covered above)
- ✧ company training management, including choice of training provider
- ✧ apprentice recruitment and selection processes
- ✧ attitudes to, and uses of, training intermediaries and incentives
- ✧ costs of (adult) training, and industrial relations practices
- ✧ training pathways and delivery for apprentices (especially among the over-25s)
- ✧ expectations of future trade and apprentice trends (especially among the over-25s)

The formal brief for this report refers to adult apprentices over 25 years of age. The 25-year mark is commonly used in education and training research as an indication that an individual will have

completed his or her first major transition from youth through education and employment to some form of career and economic independence.

The age statistics in the previous chapter refer to over-25s in training, although many of these individuals may have actually commenced training in their early twenties. In the case studies, information has also been collected on training and training trends for the over-21s, this being a common indication for employers and in awards that the individual is an adult. Several companies employed twice as many over-21 apprentices as over-25 apprentices.

Management of training

In the companies surveyed, there is usually a designated director of apprentice training, referred to as the training manager, apprentice manager, work practices manager or similar. The usual impression is that the director is a middle manager, rather than a senior executive.

Group training schemes often have field or operational staff to assist the identified training manager. Where group schemes run their own off-the-job training, a common presentation is that apprentice training is co-managed by the on- and off-the-job training managers.

Companies, including the group schemes, exhibit a slight drift away from TAFE as the main training provider, but about half still use TAFE to provide some or all off-the-job training.

Of the six big firms (500 plus employees) surveyed, Gough and Gilmour, and ActewAGL, use TAFE as the main or sole provider. Three others have recently outsourced apprentice training primarily (for all but existing, adult employees) or exclusively to group training schemes. One, the Victorian components firm, conducts its own basic off-the-job training, but has a relationship with RMIT for the development of higher-level post-trade training.

Three of the smaller (less than 500 employees) use TAFE exclusively. One uses a group training scheme and another, Flight West, sends its apprentices to an industry-wide aero trades school.

The group training schemes tend to maintain their own skills centres or academies for the purposes of off-the-job training. ACT Electro Group uses a skills centre for one trade (linespersons) and TAFE for the other (electrical). MEGT, which unlike the other four schemes services a whole variety of trades, finds it more economical to send apprentices to a variety of Melbourne TAFEs according to trade and job location.

Recruitment and selection processes

The companies surveyed draw on a variety of applicants and a variety of pathways to recruitment. In practice, this means that recruitment is opened up a little more to adults as well as the traditional type of recruit, the male school leaver with Year 10–12.

Companies do not as a rule have specific adult recruitment strategies or intakes, commenting that adults can compete in their general intakes. One large WA company, Hamersley Iron, has specifically asked its group scheme to develop an apprentice recruitment strategy for adults and for women. Some companies welcome existing (adult) employees who want to transfer into apprenticeship. Two companies rely heavily on them. In one of these two cases, the existing employees are tried and tested casual employees.

Standardised aptitude tests and personal character interviews are often mentioned in the recruitment process. In some cases, the tests are outsourced to the company's group scheme or conducted with the assistance of a local industry training advisory board (ITAB).

Among the big companies, two still get their apprentice recruits from a traditional type of advertised annual intake that primarily attracts male school leavers, and a few adults. Three other big firms have outsourced most recruitment to their group schemes, which draw on school leavers (with VET-in-Schools program, school-based apprenticeship or pre-vocational

experience) and also adults (with industry experience). However, these three companies leave the door open for existing (adult) company employees to transfer into apprenticeship.

The smaller companies use a variety of approaches. One, Flight West, finds that its reputation and an annual advertisement in a Queensland Department of Education publication are sufficient to attract a surplus of school-leaver and adult applicants to be tested for its available apprenticeships. Crane Copper conducts its own recruitment, but works off a short list compiled by an outside recruitment agency. Another smaller firm has outsourced recruitment to its group scheme, and the other two rely very much on the pool of existing employees (casual or permanent) for apprenticeships.

The five group schemes appear to have two broad types of recruitment strategy. One is a more traditional approach, culling and testing those who respond to an (annual) public advertisement. Also common is a reputational strategy, relying more on direct approaches from potential apprentices (school leavers, pre-vocational graduates, adult workers, out-of-trade apprentices) or employers of apprentices.

Uses of training intermediaries and incentives

One significant use of training intermediaries is that, as noted above, several of the companies have outsourced some or all apprentice training to group schemes. One or two companies note industry training advisory board assistance in aptitude testing of apprentices.

A few companies mention the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, (now Department of Education, Science and Training [DEST]), new apprenticeships centres (NACs), which are responsible for the signing up of all apprentices and for other State and Commonwealth administrative and subsidy aspects. In one or two cases, there is a feeling that NACs are not highly value-adding, or that the company (group scheme) could undertake this role itself.

Some concerns are raised with the Commonwealth employer incentives scheme (DETYA 2001), which provides commencement and progression payments to qualifying employers of apprentices and trainees. The more adult-friendly group schemes, which might otherwise sign on more (adult) apprentices, note that existing rules preclude them from the final 'completion' payment, which goes to employers on completion of the apprenticeship. The withholding of this final payment may be regarded as a trade-off for the other kinds of financial support that the Commonwealth provides to group schemes.

Another group scheme expresses concern that adults, who are more likely to already possess other qualifications at certificate III or above, may thereby find that the rules preclude their employers from attracting the Commonwealth employer incentive.

Only a few employers in the case studies consider the State Government side of policies and support for apprenticeships, although this may have a significant impact on the recruitment and retention of (adult) apprentices.

BIGA (Building Industry Group Apprenticeships) acknowledged support from the Queensland Government's Building and Construction Industry Training Fund. Griffin Press in Adelaide was concerned at the withdrawal—if the apprentice had already been with the company more than 12 weeks—of a substantial (90%) State Government 'user choice' related subsidy for training materials and other expenses.

One employer, Wesfarmers CSBP in WA, drew attention to the impact of State Government administrative (as opposed to funding) procedures. It felt that a lot of 'red tape' was attached to adult apprenticeships, the lack of clear documentation creating possibilities for unnecessary repetition or incorrect starting points in the off-the-job training for experienced adults.

A broad-ranging comment on government policies was received from the Victorian auto components supplier. Having a stronger interest in technology-driven and post-trade training, it proposes three types of action to support adult apprenticeships. These are: better support for post-basic (degree-diploma) trade training; better support for company (training) infrastructure and equipment; and (scholarship) support for industry experts re-skilling as technology teachers.

Training costs and industrial relations issues

Industrial relations attitudes and practices towards (adult) apprentices vary. As in the previous section, the practices are difficult to correlate with the size of the enterprise. They perhaps relate more to the company training ethos and the particular trade groups employed.

A key issue is how companies respond to the industrial 'catch 22s' of adult apprenticeships. Adult apprentice wages (see below) may be simultaneously too 'high' a cost for the employers but too 'low' a subsistence for the apprentices. Adult apprentices, usually carrying greater financial and family responsibilities, may suffer significant loss of income on apprenticeship wages. To reduce or overcome this disadvantage, companies may offer skilling incentives or employment incentives, particularly in terms of reductions in indenture time and enhanced wages or earnings.

The auto components firm and the aviation firm are not keen on accelerated completion for their adult apprentices. They tend to offer instead, as incentives to adult apprentices, the prospect of high levels of skill outcomes, or, a related aspect, the prospect of possessing higher level achievements and above-average resumes on completion of trade.

Compensating adult apprentices by acceleration of wages and competencies (that is, moving adult apprentices through the applicable wage and competency levels for that trade more quickly than their junior counterparts) is not as common as one might expect, applying to only three or four companies. This is perhaps a surprising result, as acceleration is potentially a means of faster company skill formation that also contains the overall cost of training to the firm.

Part of the explanation may be that, in the face of limited market penetration of training packages, previous customs prevail and the four-year term continues to dominate. At the end of 2000, there appears to be a total of about 25 000 apprentices in training under the key traditional trade-related training packages (NCVER 2001a, table 5). This represents less than 30% of the 86 000 apprentices in total (see table 1) for that year.

It might be thought that companies more used to training packages and practising more adventurous forms of acceleration were less represented in the case studies. There was little evidence that companies contacted, but not participating, were much different in this regard. These non-participants were spread across fairly similar industries to the participants and, on initial contact, appeared to have much the same range of training practices.

As Hamersley Iron points out, adult apprentices (especially if accelerated through training) also offer a time-honoured means of addressing peak-demand skill shortages in the trades. Similarly, Gough and Gilmour has upped its overall apprentice intakes to combat trade shortages, and would have done likewise with adult apprentices had more been available.

Electrolux in SA has supported competency-based wage progression, but this may change with outsourcing of training to a group scheme. A few companies are willing to post adult apprentices straight into the applicable second- or third-year apprentice rates, and a few are willing to 'sign off' their apprentices as qualified tradespersons inside four years. Generally, reductions of term are only 6–12 months, although two isolated instances of larger reductions were found in metal and auto trades.

About six (other) companies use a sensible strategy to compensate financially adult metal–electrical and auto apprentices who are existing employees. This involves ignoring the apprentice wage and leaving them on their applicable company wage for the duration of training.

If that is not possible, adult apprentices can sometimes lift their earnings substantially, especially in the difficult first and second years of the indenture, by undertaking more overtime or other casual non-apprentice work. Gough and Gilmour, while counselling adult apprentices about reduced wages, offers them 'unlimited' overtime as compensation.

Companies vary significantly in the extent to which the higher wages that may apply to adult (over-21 rather than over-25) apprentices are seen as a barrier to employing adult apprentices. About six companies, employing several different trade groups, mention low adult rates, but this is not usually perceived to be an insurmountable disincentive, or something that needs to be remedied by extra government wage subsidies.

There is a matter of perception here. Wage rates unattractively low to the apprentice (relative to higher adult wages generally) may at the same time be unattractively high to the employer (relative to lower junior apprentice wages). This is a factor with the group schemes BIGA of Brisbane, MTA of Adelaide, and (to some extent) MEGT in Melbourne.

MEGT notes that relevant awards only specify (higher) adult rates for their metal and auto, not electrical and construction, apprentices. This, MEGT comments, may appear to suit policy objectives and the apprentices themselves, but it may not suit the group scheme as higher wages increase the difficulty of organising rotations with 'host' employers.

In view of the Australian workplace relations reforms of recent years, surprisingly little mention is made of enterprise bargaining agreements (EBAs) as a flexible tool for the recruitment and remuneration of adult apprentices. Generally, the companies (and relevant unions) appear to be following fairly closely the relevant (usually State rather than federal) awards for their adult apprentices.

Griffin Press in Adelaide, with an established practice of converting casual company adult employees into permanent company apprentices, comments on the adverse impact for adult apprentices of a recent award change, forcing the permanent employment (or release) of any casual employees who go beyond 12 weeks with the company.

While the sample is small, the case studies suggest that EBAs and award variations are not being framed to allow reasonable leeway for the promotion and pursuit of adult apprenticeships. Some companies and adult apprentices have adopted their own strategies to counter the impediments thereby created.

Training pathways and training delivery

As a generalisation, not as a criticism, the employers of adult apprentices in the case studies could be said to favour fairly traditional forms of training delivery and traditional training pathways for their (adult) apprentices. Roughly speaking, that means following a middle path through the applicable training package for about a four-year period on fairly standard apprentice wages with standard forms of off-the-job training on day or block release.

Within that, there may be a number of practical training adaptations and innovations that can serve the interests and training needs of adult apprentices.

As already noted, some innovation is visible at the recruitment stage. Only a few companies still rely on traditional once-a-year intakes of (male) school leavers. The majority has outsourced recruitment to their group schemes or other agencies (ITABs), and/or are more inclined to recruit from a variety of sources, including VET-in-Schools graduates, school-based apprentices, pre-vocational and traineeship graduates, approaches from adults themselves who have prior industry experience or educational qualifications, and so on.

One company arranges for its apprentices to spend a 10–12 week induction period effectively off the job before they go out to employment. A few companies note that rotation through different

departments or extra project work is important in terms of broad-banding skills and achieving competencies across the breadth of units in the training package.

Of course, 'rotation' through different host employers is a given in the case of group scheme apprentices. However, both group schemes and companies admit that there is a temptation to leave good apprentices and adult apprentices with one employer (department) for long spells, which may increase short-run company productivity and apprentice overtime earnings at a cost to long-run apprentice skills and competencies.

Off-the-job apprentice training is conducted on day release (for example, in some metal and electrical trades) or block release (for example, in aeronautical, electrical, building and printing trades). Griffin Press in Adelaide, Hamersley Iron in WA, and the ACT MBA scheme, note that experienced adult apprentices may be able to complete training blocks (training weeks) a day or two early, enabling them to return to the job early and possibly hastening their overall rate of progress through off-the-job training requirements.

The Victorian auto components supplier has developed a model of training delivery and training progression (see below) that is attuned to the prior experience and future career interests of adult apprentices. This model looks toward 'dual-ticketed' or multi-skilled tradespersons, integrating traditional metal and electrical trade skills. Crane Copper, Hamersley, and Wesfarmers, exhibit similar kinds of approaches.

Adult training, and overall, trends

Companies tend to train their over-25 (or over-21) apprentices in a manner similar to that for their junior apprentices. The Victorian auto firm contends that adults ought to be exposed to the same mix of 'theory, project and assessment' work as junior apprentices. Other firms (Flight West) or group schemes (ACT Electro Group) are explicit that adults should go through similar training programs to juniors.

However, as discussed above, induction and training are modified to some extent to meet the needs of adults. Firms may use different recruitment pathways for adults. Juniors are more likely to come in as VET-in-Schools or pre-vocational graduates; adults as existing company workers. There is a certain amount of acceleration through the customary stages of training and levels of apprentice wages, but it is unusual for adults to receive sufficient recognition of prior learning or current competencies to shorten the apprenticeship by more than a few months. Where adults are existing employees, or in trades with prescribed adult rates, they may occasionally be placed on a different (higher) wage to other commencing apprentices.

As apprentices, adults are usually claimed to have advantages over juniors in terms of maturity, dependability and commitment to training. They are said to be role models, exerting a steadying influence on the juniors around them. They are more inclined to observe safety requirements where these are crucial (for example, aero and electrical trades).

Gough and Gilmour finds that their adult auto and electrical apprentices have the maturity to relate well to customers in the field, an important attribute for a retail sales and repair company. ACT Electro Group notes that adults may be suited to the increasing complexity of electrical trades and the increasing amount (half or more of total work time) of low-voltage (computing and networking) work now required. This latter point, it might be added, is an example of a traditional trade maintaining its occupational cohesion (not deskilling) yet radically changing its internal workings in the face of technological change.

Where adult apprentices are existing employees, companies say that they are giving them a development opportunity, the pay-off being a skilled workforce that can do work of higher quality or profitability. Hamersley Iron cites four specific advantages of adult employees as apprentices. They are lower risk in safety terms, are known quantities, are already familiar with the company culture, and have prospects of finishing training more quickly.

The negatives with adult apprentices may include their time out of the educational system, their fixed modes of working, or less ability to adapt to new technologies such as computing. These are not cited as major disincentives to adult apprenticeship, certainly not compared with 'high' (relative to juniors) adult apprentice wages. Employers linked with the auto group scheme in Adelaide point out that differences in learning capacity between individual apprentices may outweigh adult–junior learning differences generally.

A majority of the 16 companies venture to estimate completion rates for adult apprentices. As with their other apprentices, these are generally said to be in the 95–100% range, much higher than Australian averages. Only two companies, both group schemes, estimate their adult completion rates at 75% or less, more comparable to Australian averages.

There may be an element of self-inflation, although some of the employers surveyed are in industries (electricity, aviation) known to have very high completion rates. In any case, the proportion of adults completing training genuinely appears to be as high or higher than the proportion of juniors so doing.

A majority of the companies expect that the adults' share of their apprenticeships will change little over the next two to three years. Very few expect an actual decrease in the adults' share, and few would expect any increase. BIGA, the Brisbane group scheme, expects its numbers of adults to decrease despite an overall increase in numbers, the reason being that host employers do not see that adults have the extra skills that would justify a wage premium.

Providers' and apprentices' perspectives

In the majority of the 16 case studies, a separate view was obtained from the training provider (if separate from the employer) and from one or two of the adult apprentices (22 named apprentices in total interviewed). This section summarises their views.

Training providers and their views

As noted above, about half of the companies use TAFE for some or all of their off-the-job training, there being a slight drift toward non-TAFE providers. Despite that, TAFE emerges from the case studies with a generally positive vote from employers and apprentices as a provider prepared to make classroom, teaching, and interpersonal adjustments that will smooth the way for adult apprentices.

TAFE and other training providers generally welcome the presence of adult apprentices in their classes. They are said to be mature, committed, and more able to work under self-paced learning with minimal supervision, seeking assistance only as required.

ATAE, the non-TAFE college for the Flight West apprentices, summed up their adults as committed, motivated, mature in outlook, and attentive to critical aviation maintenance detail. The academy for BIGA, the Brisbane group scheme, is more laissez-faire. It neither encourages nor discourages adults who wish to complete pre-vocational courses. Adults are harder to place with employers, and age is not seen as a prime indicator of learning capacity.

Some adults have special learning needs, such as computer literacy (Douglas Mawson TAFE for the Griffin Press) or literacy and numeracy (the TAFE provider for Wesfarmers CSBP).

TAFE and other providers do not make an urgent case for significant variations in adult learning programs, or for recognition of prior learning (RPL) that would lead to a significant reduction in term for adult apprentices. In two cases, RPL leads to heavily reduced terms, but the more likely event is that adults will be permitted to complete individual blocks of learning or units of competency early.

The provider for Westpower expects reductions in term to become much more common upon the full implementation of the Electrotechnology Training Package and its competency-based training paradigms. RMIT apprenticeships, in association with the Victorian auto components firm, is strongly in favour of greater acceleration for adults and better provision for them through group training and in employer incentives.

An unexpected characteristic of adult apprentices, prominent in training provider comments, is their positive effect on the social dynamics of the classroom and off-the-job training. The adults are said to exert a steadying and mentoring influence on younger colleagues and their behaviour. They tend to be more appreciative (MEGT comment) of the learning and career opportunities and communicate this (TAFE provider for Crane Copper) to younger apprentices.

The positive influence extends to the classroom, where adults can be placed together (Douglas Mawson) for solidarity and can raise the general standards of class behaviour, participation, and discussion. They can be also be paired (provider for Hamersley Iron) with younger 'problem' students to stabilise them. This positive effect cuts both ways. The adults are in an environment where they can learn and are less likely to feel discomfort about age differences or time out of formal education.

In an informal, low-cost setting, the Skills Centre for the ACT MBA group scheme has adapted the delivery of the Construction Training Package, dividing it into about 15 modules or skill clusters. Adult apprentices, often ex-builders' labourers, are encouraged by a flexible, not overly academic, learning environment. The centre's manager emphasises the need for 'pastoral care' attuned to adults' more taxing family and financial circumstances.

As an off-the-job training provider, the Victorian auto components supplier monitors all apprentices closely for competencies and marks achieved, feedback from customers, and progression through to qualification and employment. It intends to move towards an integrated 'mechatronics' curriculum that, by blending the Metals and Electrotechnology Packages, is more attuned to company prospects and skill needs.

As with Electrolux in Adelaide, the adult apprentices may benefit from the auto company's deliberate focus at the outset of training on the post-trade (diploma, degree) areas beyond the apprenticeship. RMIT, the post-trade provider associated with the auto components supplier, makes the point that adult apprentices could also constitute a much-needed source of recruits to meet growth and replacement needs in trade teaching.

Two or three providers suggest that extra government support (on-the-job placement support, extra apprentice income support, or extra employer incentives) might boost adult apprentice numbers. In this context, the existing roles of new apprenticeships centres and new apprenticeships employer incentives have already been noted. Extra pre-vocational training for adults may also boost their apprenticeship chances, but there is always the risk of not finding a suitable employer thereafter.

Adult apprentices and their views

The adult apprentices have a variety of backgrounds, including university study, pre-vocational and other VET study, qualifications in other trades, a variety of adult jobs, prior semi-skilled employment with the company, and so on. Career aspirations, broadening the skill base, higher earnings for family responsibilities, and a liking for the employing company, are common motives for undertaking an adult apprenticeship.

In two firms, the Victorian auto firm and Flight West in Queensland, dissatisfied ex-university (or VET) students were using the opportunity of an apprenticeship in a 'prestige' trade to get their careers back on track. Previous Flight West apprentices had in fact gone on to complete professional qualifications. BIGA noted that its apprentices might have professional backgrounds, labouring backgrounds, or be previously unemployed.

The Gough and Gilmour interviewee, something of a 'high flier', had already completed one trade, but felt that adding another to his repertoire would give him an edge over his contemporaries undertaking university studies. Other apprentices interviewed already had one trade, but were now undertaking another. In such cases, metal trades (fitting or boilermaking), to electrical (electrician or auto electrician) trades, is a common progression.

If adults are not existing employees, undertaking pre-vocational or similar studies may boost their chances of getting an apprenticeship. In a number of companies (Crane Copper, Wesfarmers, Electrolux, Griffin Press and Elwick Road Bodyworks), the adult apprentices interviewed were existing trades assistants or casuals upgrading their qualifications.

As for the ex-university students, an adult apprenticeship is sometimes seen as a welcome 'second chance' in life. The adult apprentice at Elwick Road Bodyworks had taken a 'third chance' to qualify, having been ruled out of early apprenticeship by literacy difficulties and discouraged from later 'tradesmen's rights' accreditation by the complexity of the process.

If adults are required to take a wage cut to commence an apprenticeship, then it is a significant disincentive. A few adult apprentices said that they would simply have been unable to proceed had they not been able to keep their existing company wages. Others reluctantly accepted a wage cut, rationalising that they could make up the income by doing overtime during apprenticeship, or that there would be compensation through increased earnings and career opportunities on completion. Where the 'low' (to the apprentice) first- and second-year rates were major hurdles, conditions eased and satisfaction improved in the subsequent years as pay and overtime increased and the goal of completion loomed closer.

Some adult apprentices had distinct career aspirations, going well beyond conventional expectations of improved job security and earnings. The Gough and Gilmour apprentice was in this category. Adult apprentices with the MTA group scheme in Adelaide were pursuing apprenticeship for the qualification and for interest in the work, but also in expectation of future managerial roles or self-employment. Other companies could point to former apprentices and adult apprentices who had progressed through to management roles.

Generally, adult apprentices interviewed found that their companies and their training providers offered supportive employment and training environments. Two adult apprentices with Wesfarmers CSBP, who did three years (while in employment) of off-the-job training followed by a concluding year in a formal apprenticeship, were satisfied with TAFE but disheartened by the length of the qualification process.

Summary

In this chapter, employer case studies relating to adult apprenticeships in the 'traditional' trades are described in summary form. The training perspectives of the companies, and of their training providers and adult apprentices, are documented. The case studies concentrate on 'flagship' companies known to employ adult apprentices.

The 16 firms participating represent a total of about 1800 apprentices, including about 125 apprentices aged over 25. Very few female or adult female apprentices are in evidence.

About half of the firms surveyed still use TAFE to provide some or all of their off-the-job training. Of the six largest (500-plus employees) firms, two use TAFE and three have outsourced apprentice training to group schemes. One conducts its own basic training and links with a 'dual sector' university for advanced training. Three of the five smaller firms use TAFE while the group schemes tend to maintain their own skills centres.

Recruitment and selection innovations are increasing opportunities for prospective adult entrants. Two of the big companies still draw primarily on male school leavers. Others, while accepting existing adult employees as apprentices, have outsourced the bulk of recruitment to their group

schemes, which take in VET-in-Schools or pre-vocational graduates and also adult workers. Some smaller companies and group schemes rely on regular school-leaver intakes, while others apprentice existing employees, or depend on approaches from potential apprentices or employers.

A significant trend is the outsourcing of training to group schemes. Some companies use ITABs or other external agencies for selecting or aptitude-testing recruits. Others mention new apprenticeships centres or employer incentives, drawing attention to rules that may indirectly discourage the recruitment of adult apprentices. One large company urges improvements in State Government documentation for adult apprenticeships, while another urges wide-ranging improvements in government support for post-trade training.

Adult apprentice wages tend to be too 'high' for employers relative to junior apprentice wages, but too 'low' relative to adult wages for the apprentices themselves, who will usually have greater family and financial responsibilities than their junior colleagues.

Despite the positive impacts that it could have on training costs, company skill formation and skill shortages, acceleration of adult apprentices through the applicable wage and competency levels appears to be relatively uncommon. Past practice and limited take-up of training packages may be inhibiting factors.

Some companies are prepared to maintain adult apprentices on their previous company wage, while others will offer them extra overtime to compensate for reduced wages. While 'high–low' adult apprentice wages are not an insurmountable barrier to adult apprenticeships, enterprising bargaining agreements or awards could be framed or modified more creatively to promote more adult apprenticeships with faster skill outcomes.

Although newer recruitment pathways are more inclusive of adults, once recruited the adult apprentices in the case studies usually follow fairly traditional pathways through the applicable training package for a four-year period. Adults are more likely to complete individual blocks of training, rather than the entire apprenticeship, early. Some companies encourage adult apprentices by developing post-trade and multi-skilling pathways for them, including 'dual-ticketing' adults to qualify in two different trades.

Adult apprentices receive an overall vote of confidence from the employers as being mature, dependable, safety-conscious and committed to training. Having greater maturity, adults may do well with customer contact work in retail-oriented trades, such as the auto trades. Most companies report very high completion rates for their adult apprentices. The positives outweigh the negatives, which may include the 'high' wage factor, fixed modes of working, time out of formal education, and unfamiliarity with computing or other newer technologies.

Despite the positives, employers do not expect much increase in the adults' share of their apprenticeships over the next two to three years. Several of the employers would be willing to take higher numbers of adult apprentices, but expect that there will be an insufficient pool of suitable candidates among existing employees or from outside the company.

Training providers generally welcome adult apprentices, for reasons similar to those of employers, but rarely pursue a significant variation in the learning program or a reduction in term. Training providers encourage self-paced learning among the adults and emphasise their cohesive effect on the class and its discussions, to the benefit of younger apprentices less keen to learn or less appreciative of the career opportunity.

Some providers press for extra government support (extra placement assistance, income support or employer incentive payments) as a means of encouraging adult apprenticeship.

While some adult apprentices are classic 'adult improvers' glad to take a second chance to qualify, a number interviewed were in the nature of 'high fliers' with a university background, with an existing trade qualification, or with management or business aspirations. Career aspirations,

broadening of skills, job and income security, and company loyalties, are the most commonly cited motives for undertaking an adult apprenticeship. Interviewees praise the supportiveness of employers and training providers, while expressing reservations about less palatable aspects such as low wages or lengthy training periods.

A number of themes arise from the complementary views of employers, providers and apprentices about the management of adult apprenticeships:

- ✧ a slight shift away from TAFE, but generally positive views of its adult training capacities
- ✧ notable innovation in recruitment and selection, to the advantage of adult apprentices
- ✧ the 'high–low' nature of adult apprentice wages, and possible avenues to address this
- ✧ conventional pathways observed for many adult apprentices, the limited wage and competency progressions perhaps limiting solutions to training costs and skill shortages
- ✧ evidence of a more ambitious approach to post-trade and multi-skilling pathways, such as to address the needs of 'high flier' adult apprentices as well as 'adult improvers'
- ✧ cogent, generally favourable, employer and provider views of adult apprentices, and high completion rates, without much expectation that their numbers in training will rise
- ✧ generally modest, but a few far-reaching, suggestions for greater or different government support of adult apprenticeships
- ✧ the positive impact of adults on juniors for trade teaching quality and outcomes
- ✧ the different types of adults doing apprenticeships, their diverse career paths and diverse capacities to address skill gaps and skill shortages

Conclusions

This chapter combines the background statistics and research with the case studies, to develop concluding themes and strategies.

Background to the report

Stimuli for this report were the demographic changes taking place in the Australian population and in the labour market. The population and labour force are ageing. New apprenticeship, especially traineeship, intakes have aged. Youth intakes may not be sufficient in the future to meet the needs of industries facing skill shortages. It is expected that adults will become increasingly important as a source of entry-level skills for companies.

The report examines the statistical and research evidence about adult apprentices in traditional trades, in order to develop hypotheses about firms' training practices and innovations for adult apprentices. An additional aim is to develop ideas and recommendations to encourage more firms to train more adult apprentices.

Through the medium of employer case studies, conducted in 2001 with the assistance of State training agencies and industry and training bodies, the report probes company approaches to encouraging and accommodating adult apprentices in the traditional trades (especially mechanical, auto, electrical–electronic and construction).

The report examines the appropriateness of the traditional apprentice model for training adults (over 25 years of age), and studies how firms are adapting training practices and workplaces to meet their needs. It seeks out training innovations and ideas that may assist in developing more effective training for adults to help resolve ongoing skill shortages.

Research and case studies reviewed

This section draws together and compares key findings from the training statistics and research, and from the employer case studies that were conducted.

- The important statistical shift in Australia's training system is the growth in traineeships since 1995. Traineeships have expanded around, rather than at the expense of, the trades, which are holding their own in terms of training and workforce numbers.
- While the over-25s share of training in 'traditional' trades has crept up from 8% to 12% over 1995–2000, women and adult women still hold much smaller shares of the training.
- Studies point to the net cost to employers of trade training, especially in the 'traditional' trades. Such studies, however, query the value of shifting more of the cost to apprentices. Adult apprentice wage rates may appear 'high' to the employer if not the apprentice, but extra employer training incentives are not available to offset this.
- Recent reports demonstrate cautious experimentation with 'alternative pathways' in the traditional trades. More adult-friendly policy and program initiatives could unblock trade skill

pathways and skill shortages. Non-apprenticeship pathways to skills can also help to address trade skill shortages.

- A major 2001 survey on wastage from the trades points to high adult apprentice completion rates. However, replenishment through formal apprenticeship remains low in the traditional trades—about 2% workforce replenishment annually compared to 4% or more 15 years ago.
- Sixteen firms employing adult apprentices in 'traditional' trades contributed case studies to this report. The sample was reasonably representative of the overall distribution of 'traditional' trade employment. About 7% of the 1800 apprentices represented were aged over 25, but few female apprentices were in evidence.
- About half of the 16 firms still use TAFE for some or all off-the-job training. With the availability of 'user choice' after 1998, most of the rest have redirected off-the-job training to group schemes or to their own skill centres. New recruitment and selection pathways opening up among the firms, including outsourcing of recruitment and the admission of existing adult employees to apprenticeship, may increase adult apprentice opportunities.
- While research picks up the 'high' cost to employers of adult apprentice wages, it tends to play down their 'low' value relative to adult wages generally. Considering the potential benefits, acceleration of adult apprentices through wage and competency levels is restricted. The low market penetration of the relevant training packages may be a factor.
- In line with recent research, the case studies suggest the 'high- low' adult wage problem gets limited attention through industrial relations and enterprise bargaining, although a number of employers make individualised adjustments by keeping adult apprentices on at their existing company wages or giving them extra overtime.
- To the mutual advantage of employers and apprentices, the latter may finish individual blocks of training early, or 'sign off' their indentures early. Importantly, a number of employers are looking to give adults enhanced post-trade skill and career outcomes, including 'dual ticketing' and assistance with further study.
- In the case studies, employers and training providers value adult apprentices for maturity, dependability and (mirroring recent research) high completion rates. The positives outweigh the negatives, such as 'high' adult apprentice wages and perceived educational or workplace inflexibilities. Despite the positives, employers do not expect that adult apprentice numbers will rise in trades. Pools of suitable internal or external recruits are depleted all too quickly.
- Some employers urge extra placement assistance, income support or employer incentive payments for adult apprentices, or better documentation of procedures and pathways. One employer calls for broader government support for post-trade training and training infrastructure. Training providers endorse adults' self-paced learning capacities and their positive contributions to class cohesion, discussion and outcomes, including role modelling for younger apprentices.
- Adult apprentices interviewed emphasise their diverse backgrounds and contributions to company skill needs, from 'adult improvers' to the 'high flier' with management aspirations. While praising employer and provider support, a fair proportion of the adult apprentices are less enthusiastic about low wages and lengthy training requirements.

Themes and strategies

Building on the case studies, this concluding section develops themes and suggested strategies for getting adults into the trades. The themes are:

- reviewing adult apprenticeship trends and policy
- managing adult apprentice costs and wages
- broadening adult trade and skill pathways
- training adult apprentices for skill gaps and shortages
- adult apprentices contributing to cohorts' training outcomes

Reviewing adult apprenticeship trends and policy

This theme originates as a result of first examining adult apprenticeship trends, and secondly examining the general treatment of adult training issues in VET policy and measurement.

'New apprenticeships' are more inclusive of adults and women than are trades and traditional trades. Adults over 25 have made some gains in traditional trades in the past five years (12% of training, up from 8%), but females and adult women have made virtually none.

To the extent that the case studies are representative, they exhibit similar trends. On average, the 16 firms employ only modest proportions (about 7% aged 25 and over) of adult apprentices, although two of the manufacturing firms actually rely primarily on adult apprentices. Female apprentices are scarcely in evidence, numbering about a dozen, or less than 1% of the total number of apprentices embraced by the case studies.

For cogent reasons, employers and training providers hold adult apprentices in high esteem. But there is little optimism that their numbers will rise. Employers appear to have exhausted the pool of suitable existing adult employees or do not expect that, other things being equal, existing labour market and adult apprentice wage conditions will lead to higher numbers of suitable external applicants.

Current national VET policies and performance measurement priorities, while recognising re-skilling needs in the ageing workforce, give limited attention to adult training and adult apprenticeship issues. Since 1995, the adult and adult female gains in training are very much in traineeships rather than trades. Looking forward over the next five years, a case can be made for more gains in trades. This relates to the general ageing of the workforce and the need for more adult training, the evidence that adults are only making slow gains in trades under current policies, and the particular contributions that adult apprentices can make to the demand (skill gaps and shortages) and supply (training quality and outcomes) sides.

In reviewing adult apprenticeship trends and policy, the following actions may prove useful:

- ✧ that there be more open and intensive reporting of trends in adult and adult female apprenticeships in the trades and traditional trades, and their post-trade equivalents
- ✧ that VET performance reporting gives a more definite account of outcomes and priorities for adult training, especially for adults in trades
- ✧ that consideration be given to indicative targets for adult (for example, over-25s to have 20% of all training by 2005) and adult female (for example, over-25 women to have 10% of all training among over-25s by 2005) shares of training in the traditional trades

Managing adult apprentice costs and wages

This theme originates from the analysis in the case studies that the 'high–low' adult apprentice wage phenomenon is a, or the, main obstacle to increasing their numbers.

The research evidence is that trade training is a net cost borne by the employer for social and community motives, or in expectation of a pay-off from retaining apprentices after training. Costs are higher in the traditional trades, and higher in the first year than later years.

The case-study evidence is that, for employers, 'high' adult apprentice wages compared with junior rates are the main impediment to employing more adults, rather than any perceived learning or workplace inflexibilities that adults may have by comparison with juniors. But, from the adult apprentice's point of view, the apprentice wage is 'low' compared to adult wages generally, or low compared to their accustomed adult wages. With the extra family and financial responsibilities that go with age, the first year or two of indenture can be disheartening.

The research and case studies suggest that specific accommodation for adult training needs is fairly uncommon in enterprise bargaining agreements. Extra overtime, and keeping adults on at

their previous company rates, are common local adjustments for adult apprentices. Some awards specify adult rates, but these may both advantage and disadvantage apprentices. New award variations, such as those requiring permanent engagement of casual employees, can inadvertently disadvantage adult apprentices.

The practice of keeping existing employees on at their previous wage as adult apprentices is common sense, equitable and to be encouraged. In some cases, it might make sense to extend a similar privilege to adult apprentices who are new employees. Another option is to post adult apprentices with relevant experience straight on to a second- or third-year wage rate. Extra overtime is also used, but can be a mixed blessing, as it has the capacity to work against broad-banding of skills or training quality generally.

Some employers and some adult apprentices may legitimately continue to prefer the full four-year term. As the use of relevant training packages increases, shorter indentures (given due quality assurance) would be one sensible means of compensating other adult apprentices possessing relevant skills and work experience but having to accept a lower wage. Quality skill outcomes surely could be achieved in two to three years in some cases. Another compensation would be to use the training package materials to offer adult apprentices enhanced work projects and skills that build on their previous experience.

Some employers urge a different approach to employer incentives to help defray the costs of adult apprentices. Current DEST employer incentives are nominally age-neutral, but they do not apply to any person already possessing a certificate III qualification, as becomes much more likely with increasing age (see DETYA 2000, 2001).

A higher sign-on bounty could be attached to each adult apprentice, but the history of such bounties is mixed. Another measure, linked to actual skill formation, might be to offer employers enhanced progression or completion payments for adults, or for faster progression by adults. Enhanced adult-related payments could also be attached to group schemes, which are doing good work with adults but which do not receive any completion payments at present.

In managing adult apprentice costs and wages, the following actions may prove useful:

- that the practice of keeping adult apprentices at existing company wages, or at equivalent company wages, be encouraged
- that relevant metal, electrical, auto and construction awards be re-examined for the presence of fair and equitable variations to accommodate adult apprentices
- that, with due quality assurance, more widespread use be made of shorter indentures or enhanced skilling to compensate adult apprentices with relevant prior experience for their periods on 'low' wages
- that there be an investigation of enhanced employer incentive payments (perhaps linked to progression, rather than per capita) attaching to the engagement of adult apprentices

Broadening adult trade and skill pathways

This theme is concerned with the evidence in the research and the case studies of progress with, but constraints to, adult apprentice pathways.

The research describes cautious experimentation with 'alternative pathways' in the trades, although Webster et al. (2001) argue that these new pathways are still insufficiently responsive to adult training and up-skilling needs. That is not to deny the importance of non-apprenticeship VET pathways to skills, and their capacity to reduce skill shortages, as confirmed by recent studies of electrotechnology and construction trades. However, it is often the case in core metal and electrical trades that non-trade pathways do not lead to entry to actual trades jobs.

In the case studies, broader approaches to training are evident in terms of the diversification of training providers and in diversified recruitment and selection processes that are more inclusive

of adults. Existing adult employees, or adult pre-vocational graduates, make sense as prospective apprentices, as they have demonstrated a commitment to the firm or trade.

Once adult recruits join the firms, they tend to travel along fairly traditional apprenticeship pathways. As noted above, practical and helpful adjustments to standard wages and overtime are often made in favour of adults. Older apprentices can finish blocks of training early, and occasionally 'sign off' their entire indentures a little early. Early sign-off finds favour with providers and apprentices, perhaps more so than with employers. Some employers believe it may become more common as training packages and their pathways mature.

Cully and Curtain (2001) propose that older apprentices in the trades be vetted or 'skill-audited' before they commence. In the case studies, one employer would have preferred clearer documentation of pathways and procedures for adult apprentices, to ensure correct starting points and smooth progression of training. While current trade-related training packages provide great detail, this may be technical detail about the units and combinations of units, rather than basic information about the pathways and progressions that might suit particular types of employer or apprentice.

Innovative employers and training providers are looking to give adult apprentices enhanced skills and careers during the apprenticeship (extra skills and achievements, dual ticketing) or after (pathways to post-trade skills, teaching and management). The training packages, to the extent that they have been adopted in the 'traditional' trades, may make it easier and quicker for adults to achieve these dual tickets or post-trade qualifications.

One firm made broad proposals for better government support for post-trade training, and for company training infrastructure, equipment and expertise. This is analogous to the NCVER (2001b) proposal for increasing the relative share of apprenticeship training going into the paraprofessional and technician occupations.

To some extent, post-trade training for adults appears to fall between two stools. It would not normally be supported, by employer incentives (for employers), or by AUSTUDY (for students). Employer incentives, for example, are available for some apprentices upgrading from certificate II to III or IV, but not for access to post-trade qualifications as such. While students may have to be over 25 to attract AUSTUDY support for (post-trade or any) diplomas (Centrelink 2001), they usually have to be studying full time, which is out of line with the career and family tracks of the kinds of adult apprentices being examined here.

A similar institutional 'demarcation' issue arises with some post-trade diploma, or even degree, pathways. Such pathways may be delineated in training packages, nominally the province of VET, but historically the qualifications are more the province of higher education. This demarcation issue may be easier to address in the dual sector institutions.

In broadening adult trade and skill pathways, the following actions may prove useful:

- ✧ that industry bodies, new apprenticeships centres, training packages and training providers, develop and document 'model' pathways, progressions and procedures for adults in 'traditional' apprenticeships and studying post-trade
- ✧ that continuing efforts be made to facilitate pre-vocational pathways and non-trade skill pathways for adults trying to enter occupations in, and related to, the 'traditional' trades
- ✧ that the Commonwealth and States consider introducing 'demonstration' projects offering training infrastructure and post-trade training support to enterprises contracting to boost adult and adult female training in trades and post-trades
- ✧ that the Commonwealth consider the costs and benefits of extending adult employer or adult study benefits to economically valuable post-trade and related occupations

Training adult apprentices for skill gaps and shortages

This theme considers shortages in the 'traditional' trades, which might be remedied over time if more adults were available to augment the supply pools.

Statistics and labour market research over the past 15–20 years point to persistently low rates of supply and recurrent shortages in the 'traditional' trades. With annual rates of replenishment through formal apprenticeship falling away to about 2%, it is not surprising that shortages might persist or that non-trade pathways to skills might increase.

Recent Commonwealth and State studies give varying estimates of apprenticeship completion rates. Adult (over 25) apprenticeship rates remain fairly low, at about 12% of total numbers in training for 'traditional' trades. Recent research (Harris et al. 2001; Cully & Curtain 2001) points to the personal, labour market and training factors associated with training completion and to high adult apprentice completion or re-engagement rates. In the present case studies, the factors associated with high adult apprentice completion appear to relate to careful initial selection and to the apprentices' maturity and commitment.

Increasing the share of 'traditional' apprenticeships flowing to adults may improve VET system performance in terms of higher overall completion rates and reduced shortages.

A truism of labour market research is that relative shortages of skilled labour in some areas of the trades can co-exist with relative labour market balance or oversupply in others. The ANTA (2000a) report on alternative pathways is an indication that adult apprentices have a role to play in addressing these types of shortages. The report indicates that new pathways can be triggered by skill shortages and particular high-skill needs and, correspondingly, that they open up training pathways to new groups on the supply side (for example, adults).

Similarly, the case studies suggest that complementary types of adult apprentices are helping to fill different types of skill niches and skill requirements in the trades. The classical 'adult improver' may raise company quality, skill and productivity by upgrading within the smaller firm. Other kinds of high-achieving adult apprentices could (if offered fair and reasonable pathways) diversify the supply of post-trade and management skills in larger firms, also boosting the supply of industry experts and teachers for the trades.

Recent industry-sponsored studies of national skill shortages in the 'traditional' trades point to adult training issues among the skill solutions, including alternative and non-trade pathways to skills, recognition of prior learning, retraining of experienced workers, and post-trade up-skilling into supervision and management.

In training adult apprentices for skill gaps and shortages, the following actions may prove useful:

- that there be more research and promotion of factors associated with (high) adult apprenticeship completion in the 'traditional' trades
- that government and industry groups encourage employers to look to adult apprentices, especially existing employees, as a supply source for niches in the trades and post-trades
- that model trade and skill pathways for adults in 'traditional' trades continue to respond to directions and findings in national industry studies of skill gaps and shortages

Adult apprentices contributing to cohorts' training outcomes

The case studies demonstrate that adult apprentices can make particular contributions to the cohesion and quality of on- and off-the-job training in the group.

High completion rates are an indirect form of evidence that, despite the wage reductions or other hardships that may apply, adult apprentices are surviving the apprenticeship and making a

positive contribution to training outcomes. Little research has been conducted on the in-training experiences of these apprentices relative to their juniors.

In these case studies, employers and training providers have a consistent view of the training contribution that adults can make. Employers value them for their high completion rates.

On the job, they are seen as mature, committed, dependable and safety-conscious, and these advantages tend to outweigh age-related working and learning inflexibilities that may exist. Older apprentices can mentor juniors, and they may be better placed than employers or teachers to convince younger apprentices of the value of the training opportunity.

Training providers endorse the value of older apprentices in the skill centre and classroom situation. They lift group cohesion, discussion and outcomes. Some training providers consciously aim to provide adult-friendly learning environments, to provide special training to overcome adult literacy or skill deficits, or to improve class dynamics by pairing adult apprentices with one another or with younger 'problem' students.

For adult apprentices to contribute to cohort training outcomes, the following actions may prove useful:

- ✧ that the effects of adults on training quality and completion in 'traditional' trade apprentice groups be studied in more detail
- ✧ that industry groups and training package materials encourage adult appprentice employers and training providers to provide adult-friendly training and to make use of adults' beneficial peer and classroom influences

References

AIG (Australian Industry Group) 2000, *Engineering skills shortages*, AIG, Canberra.

ANTA (Australian National Training Authority) 1998, *A bridge to the future: Australia's national strategy for vocational education and training*, ANTA, Brisbane.

—— 2000a, *Alternative pathways to AQF certificate III qualifications in trade occupations*, ANTA national project managed by WA Department of Training, ANTA, Brisbane.

—— 2000b, *Annual national report 1999 of the Australian vocational education and training system: Volume 3—vocational education and training performance*, ANTA, Brisbane.

Billett, S & Cooper, M 1998, 'Returns to enterprises from investment in vocational education and training', in *Readings in Australian vocational education and training research*, eds C Robinson & P Thomson, NCVER, Adelaide, pp.57–90.

Callan, VJ 2000, *Report on apprenticeship and traineeship non-completions*, Department of Employment, Training and Industrial Relations, Brisbane.

CLMR (Centre for Labour Market Research) 1997, *Evaluation of the impact of the financial incentives on the recruitment of entry level trainees*, Department of Employment, Education and Training, Canberra.

Centrelink 2001, *AUSTUDY guidelines*, Centrelink, Canberra.
http://www.centrelink.gov.au and links [accessed 3 December 2001]

Cully, M & Curtain, R 2001, *Reasons for new apprentices' non-completions*, NCVER, Adelaide.

Curtain, R 1996, *Is Australia locked into a low quality/ low skills cycle?*, Monash–CEET, Melbourne.

DEIR (Department of Employment and Industrial Relations) 1986, *Occupational outlook: The supply and demand for skilled labour*, DEIR, Canberra.

DETYA (Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs) 2000, *New apprenticeship incentives for employing existing staff as new apprentices*, DETYA, Canberra.

—— 2001, *Summary of the Commonwealth New Apprenticeships Incentives Programme, DETYA*, Canberra.

DEWRSB (Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business) 2000, *DEWRSB job outlook: September 2000*, DEWRSB, Canberra.

Dockery, AM, Kelly, R, Norris, K & Stromback, P 2001, 'Costs and benefits of apprentices', in *Australian Bulletin of Labour*, vol.27, no.3, National Institute of Labour Studies, Adelaide.

Electrotechnology Working Group 2000, *A report on skill shortages in electrotechnology*, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Canberra.

Guthrie, H & Barnett, K 1996, *Training and enterprise bargaining*, NCVER, Adelaide.

Hall, R, Buchanan, J, Bretherton, T, van Barneveld, K & Pickersgill, R 2000, *Making the grade?: Globalisation and the training market in Australia, volumes 1 and 2*, NCVER, Adelaide.

Harris, R, Simons, M, Symons, H & Clayton, B 2001, 'Factors that contribute to retention and completion in apprenticeships and traineeships', in *Australian apprenticeships: Research readings*, NCVER, Adelaide, pp.221–237.

Hawke, A & Wooden, M 1997, *The changing face of Australian industrial relations*, National Institute of Labour Studies, Adelaide.

Jenkins, R 1999, 'Training challenges in Australia's manufacturing industries', in *Future training issues in Australia's industries: A collection of papers presented at the NCVER 1998 conference*, ed. P Curtin, NCVER, Adelaide, pp.25–29.

Kemp, D 1996, *Training for real jobs*, AGPS, Canberra.

KPMG Management Consulting, with Bob Marshman & Associates, 1998, *Impact of the growth of labour hire companies on the apprenticeship system*, ANTA, Brisbane.

Malley, J 1997, 'Entry level training and New Apprenticeships: Delivery and funding options', in Centre for Economics of Education and Training and NCVER, *Different drums, one beat: Economic and social goals in education and training*, NCVER, Adelaide, pp.227–239.

Mitchell, R, Robertson, I & Shorten, A 1999, *Law and policy in vocational education and training: A contemporary survey*, NCVER, Adelaide.

NCVER (National Centre for Vocational Education Research) 1998, *Australian apprentice and trainee statistics 1997–98*, NCVER, Adelaide.

—— 1999a, *Australian apprentice and trainee statistics 1998*, vol.4, no.6, NCVER, Adelaide.

—— 1999b, *Australian apprentice and trainee statistics trends 1995 to 1998: An overview*, NCVER, Adelaide.

—— 2000a, *Australian apprentice and trainee statistics: Automotive repairs and service trades 1995–1999*, NCVER, Adelaide.

—— 2000b, *Australian apprentice and trainee statistics: Electrical and electronics trades 1995–1999*, NCVER, Adelaide.

—— 2000c, *Australian apprentice and trainee statistics: Mechanical engineering and fabrication trades 1995–1999*, NCVER, Adelaide.

—— 2000d, *Australian apprentice and trainee statistics: Skills supply to the trade industries 1995–1999*, NCVER, Adelaide.

—— 2000e, *Women in VET: At a glance*, NCVER, Adelaide.

—— 2001a, *Australian apprentice and trainee statistics annual 2000: At a glance*, NCVER, Adelaide.

—— 2001b, *Australian apprenticeships: Facts, fiction and future*, NCVER, Adelaide.

—— 2001c, *Australian apprenticeships: Facts, fiction and future—Appendices*, NCVER, Adelaide. http://www.ncver.edu.au/research/proj2/mk0006a.pdf

—— 2001d, *Australian apprenticeships: Research at a glance*, NCVER, Adelaide.

—— 2001e, *Group training apprenticeships and traineeships in Australia*, NCVER, Adelaide.

NCVER & DEWRSB (Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business) 2001, *Skill trends in the building and construction trades*, NCVER, Adelaide.

NECA (National Electrical Contractors' Association) 1998, *Barriers to the employment of apprentices in the electrical, electronic and communications industry*, NECA, Melbourne.

—— 2001, 'New apprenticeships in electrotechnology: A summary of research into why contractors employ and train apprentices' (pamphlet), NECA, Melbourne.

Ray, D, Beswick, W, Lawson, C, O'Brien, C & Madigan, S 2000, *Attrition in apprenticeships: An analysis of apprentices commencing between July 1994 and June 1996*, REB report 1/00, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Canberra.

Ray, J 2001, 'Apprenticeship in Australia: A concise history', in *Australian apprenticeships: Research readings*, NCVER, Adelaide, pp.15–41.

RERU–GREAT (Regional Economic Research Unit & Group for Research in Employment and Training) and Western Institute of TAFE 1998, *An economic evaluation of alternative methods of delivering employer provided electrical trade and mechanical engineering trade apprenticeship training*, NCVER, Adelaide.

RIWG (Rural Industry Working Group) 2001, *Skills needs now and in the future in the rural industry*, RIWG, Canberra.

Saunders, S 2001, 'Issues and directions from the Australian apprenticeship and traineeship literature', in *Australian apprenticeships: Research readings*, NCVER, Adelaide, pp.43–73.

Schofield, K 1999, *Independent investigation into the quality of training in Queensland's traineeship system*, Department of Employment, Training and Industrial Relations, Brisbane.

—— 2000, *Report of the independent review of the quality of training in Victoria's apprenticeship and traineeship system*, Office of Post Compulsory Education, Training and Employment, Melbourne.

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education Committee 2000, *Aspiring to excellence: Report of the inquiry into the quality of vocational education and training in Australia*, Parliament of Australia, Canberra.

Smith, L 1998, *Apprenticeships and traineeships: Queensland trends*, DETIR, Brisbane.

—— 2000, *Apprenticeships and traineeships: Queensland trends—1998–99 update*, DETIR, Brisbane.

VACC (Victorian Automobile Chamber of Commerce) 2000, *Skill shortages in the retail motor industry*, prepared by VACC for the Automotive Working Group.

Webster, E, Dockery, M, Bainger, T & Kelly, R 2001, 'Training for skilled trades in Australia, 1980–2000: Training reforms', in *Australian apprenticeships: Research readings*, NCVER, Adelaide, pp.179–197.

Appendix: Questions used in the case studies[1]

Questions directed to the company's apprenticeship manager

Q1. What is your company's total employment, and employment of tradespersons and apprentices in the electrical[2] trades? Can you divide the tradespersons and apprentices into numbers in individual electrical trades?[3]

Q2. How many of the apprentices (at Q1) are over 25 (at time of survey)? Tell us about 21–25s too if there are a number of them.

Q3. Do you expect the total number of apprentices (at Q1) to go up, go down, or remain steady, over the next 2–3 years? How about over-25s? What factors influence your answer?

Q4. Can you estimate what percentage of your apprentices would usually complete their training satisfactorily? Is it any different for the over-25s?

Q5. Can you comment on the main reasons that might cause your apprentices, and your adult apprentices, to complete or not to complet training?

Q6. Who (if not you) provides off-the-job training and can you give us contact details (phone, e-mail) of a senior course co-ordinator or similar? (NCVER would ask them Q11, as below)

Q7. We will send you back a two-page draft, developed from what you send us, but do you have any particular preferences as to how your material should be glossed for any public report?

Q8. We'd like to get a thumbnail sketch of how you like to train your electrical apprentices. These are some issues it might be useful to probe:

Recruitment practices?

Use of government incentives and support (including ITABs, new apprenticeships centres, employer incentives, group training companies)?

Organisation and workplace practices, or industrial relations practices?

Training delivery arrangements (RTOs, teaching, release patterns, module arrangements, etc.)?

Training pathways (typical trade path, accelerated trade, upfront traineeship, RPL, VET-in-Schools, etc?)

Any differences with over-25s?

---

1 Slightly different versions of the questions were used from time to time, and from employer to employer. Some employers were interviewed face-to-face, in other cases telephone interviews or e-mail responses were used

2 Q1 refers here to electrical trades. Evidently, Q1, and so on, were modified according to the particular trade group or groups likely to be encountered

3 Q1 is not strictly applicable to group training schemes, and was modified appropriately in practice

Q9. For your company, what are the main pluses and minuses of having over-25 apprentices, What are the blockages to having them, and what would bring in more of them?

Questions for (1–2 of) the company's adult (over-25) apprentices

Q 10. Essentially, we'd like to know a bit about previous education and employment, motivations for now doing adult training (with your company), extent to which their training does or does not accommodate over-25s, likes and dislikes in the apprenticeship, intentions for and on completion.

Questions for the company training provider (RTO)

Q 11. Essentially, we would inquire about the RTO views on prospects for over-25s in trades generally, how they train the over-25s for the company, what training innovations they are practising (or see a need for) with over-25s, and how they monitor and evaluate training.

NCVER

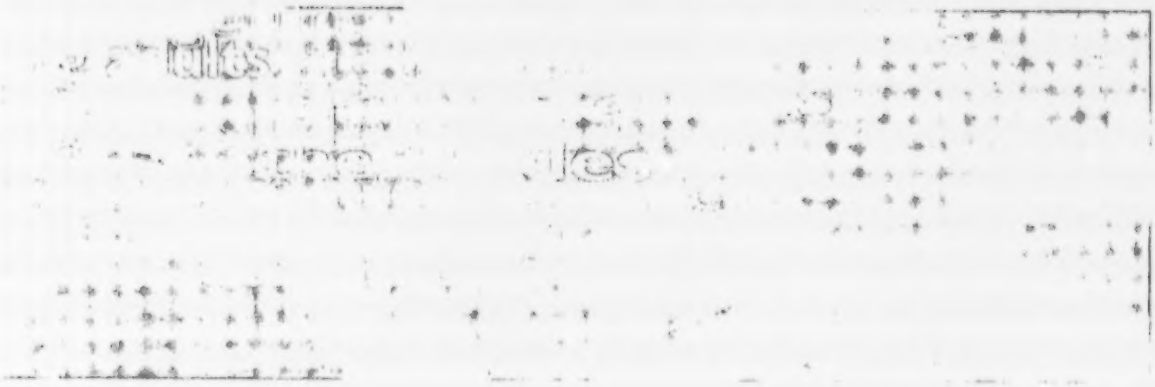
The National Centre for Vocational Education Research is Australia's primary research and development organisation in the field of vocational education and training.

NCVER undertakes and manages research programs and monitors the performance of Australia's training system.

NCVER provides a range of information aimed at improving the quality of training at all levels.

ISBN 1 74096 062 9 print edition
ISBN 1 74096 063 7 web edition

NCVER



Getting adults into the trades

Case studies

Stephen Saunders

John Saunders

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Publisher's note

This is a companion volume to the NCVER report *Getting adults into the trades*, which can be found on NCVER's website www.ncver.edu.au

© 2002 National Centre for Vocational Education Research Ltd

ISBN 1 74096 085 8 web edition

TD/TNC 70.20

Published by
National Centre for Vocational Education Research Ltd
ABN 87 007 967 311
252 Kensington Road, Leabrook, SA 5068
PO Box 115, Kensington Park, SA 5068, Australia
www.ncver.edu.au

Contents

Background 4

Case studies 5

- Adult pathways in automotive (and other) trades: Gough and Gilmour, NSW 5
- Adult pathways in metal and electrical trades: Crane Copper Tube, NSW 7
- Adult pathways in the metal and electrical trades: A Victorian auto components supplier 9
- Adult pathways in the trades: Melbourne East Group Training, Melbourne 11
- Adult pathways in aero trades: Flight West, Queensland 12
- Adult pathways in the building trades: Building Industry Group Apprenticeships, Brisbane 13
- Adult pathways in metal and electrical trades: Hamersley Iron, WA 15
- Adult pathways in metal and electrical trades: Wesfarmers CSBP, WA 17
- Adult pathways in electrical trades: Westpower Services, WA 19
- Adult pathways in the electrical and metal trades: Electrolux, Adelaide 22
- Adult pathways in the printing trades: Griffin Press, Adelaide 24
- Adult pathways in the automotive trades: MTA Group Training, SA 26
- Adult pathways in the auto trades: Elwick Road Bodyworks, Hobart 28
- Adult pathways in electrical trades: ActewAGL, ACT 29
- Adult pathways in building trades: ACT Master Builders' Association Group Training 30
- Adult pathways in the electrical trades: ACT Electro Group 32

Background

With the ageing of the Australian population, changing life career patterns, and continuing supply shortfalls in the 'traditional' trades, school leaver apprenticeships may not be enough to meet most or all demands. Adults are becoming an increasingly important recruitment source.

That is the rationale for the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) report *Getting adults into the trades*. The first chapter of that report presents a summary of relevant statistics and research on adults in trades; this is followed by a detailed analysis in the second chapter of employer-based case studies that were conducted in 2001. The final chapter develops concluding themes and strategies for getting adults into the trades.

This is a companion website report, *Getting adults into the trades: Case studies*. It is a reference document containing the full versions of the case studies as they were collected from the 16 firms employing adult apprentices that participated, in all States and the ACT.

The authors would like to thank the training managers, training providers, and adult apprentices of the firms for their kind assistance.

Readers who are interested in the analysis of the case studies and in the concluding themes and strategies should consult the full report *Getting adults into the trades*.

Note: In the case studies, ASCO = Australian Standard Classification of Occupations (1997) and ANZSIC = Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification (1993).

Adult pathways in automotive (and other) trades: Gough and Gilmour, NSW

Gough and Gilmour Holdings (GGH) is a long-established Australian company. Operating 20 branches across New South Wales (NSW) and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), GGH has been an accredited Caterpillar tractor dealer since 1925, specialising in sales and service of earthmoving equipment and heavy truck engines.

Employer training perspective

GGH employs a total workforce approaching 800, two-thirds of which is trade related. The workforce includes 450 (55%) qualified tradespersons and 150 (20%) apprentices. Of the 150 apprentices, two (1%) are females and about ten (7%), including one of the females, are adults. The main trades are heavy vehicle mechanic, heavy plant mechanic and agricultural mechanic (all ASCO 4211), automotive electrician (ASCO 4212), and boilermaker (ASCO 4122).

Selection and training processes

GGH branches recruit the apprentices in accordance with company criteria. Before appointment, all apprentices are tested by an outside agency to ensure they possess the necessary aptitudes and physical health. No special attention is paid to the age of applicants, all appointments being strictly on merit. Careful recruitment ensures that the drop-out rate during apprenticeship is less than 2%, and this is mainly attributable to unforeseen circumstances or accidents. Adult drop-outs are almost unheard of.

Due to a persistent shortage of qualified tradespersons, GGH has employed increasing numbers of apprentices in recent years. There is also a marked turnover in apprentices— approximately 30% of completing juniors leaving the company each year to take up jobs elsewhere. By contrast, virtually all the adult apprentices remain with the company upon completion. Branches located in the Sydney metro area experience a higher turnover of staff than those in regional areas.

Statutory off-the-job training is provided by technical and further education (TAFE). GGH supplements this with about 80 hours a year of specialised GGH in-house training.

Adults (over-25s)

The company would welcome more eligible adults into apprenticeship, but few apply. The reason is thought to be the relatively low rate of pay that adult apprenticeship attracts. The company thoroughly counsels prospective adult apprentices on this before indenturing them. To help them cope with the reduced pay, the company offers unlimited overtime most of the year. 'Adult apprentices look for this, whereas the juniors are not prepared to work a 12-hour day,' said a company spokesperson.

Adults, because of their maturity and commitment, are generally seen as easier to manage and train. They tend to be more productive in the first two years and can be given tasks requiring greater responsibility, particularly if they come with relevant industrial experience. Extra maturity is beneficial to the company's image when apprentices interact with customers in the field, as they commonly need to do. The one disadvantage identified was a tendency for some adults with another trade under their belt to 'think they know it all'.

From the company's perspective, adults offer benefits in terms of greater commitment, fewer disciplinary issues, and better attendance. 'You don't get TAFE phoning up to say an adult apprentice did not turn up—I would never have any problem putting on an adult apprentice,' said a workshop manager. Adults undertake the same training as other apprentices and do not appear to have any difficulty with TAFE, dispelling this manager's fear that they might not be accepted by the younger students.

Apprentice perspective

The Sydney apprentice interviewed for this study was 23 years old, living with a partner in rented accommodation. After Year 12, he undertook a fitting and machining apprenticeship with a regional heavy engineering company. In his fourth year, company downsizing forced him to relocate to a Sydney branch to complete the apprenticeship. To increase his repertoire of skills, he then embarked on a second apprenticeship as an automotive electrician with GGH. He had initially contemplated advanced study in fitting and machining, but decided instead on automotive electrical because, in his view, it 'was more highly skill-based'.

To undertake the second apprenticeship, the apprentice had to accept a 50% reduction in income, but saw the sacrifice as worthwhile: 'I appreciate this [second] opportunity a lot more because it's my future. It's what I'm going to have to use to make money for the rest of my life. Some of my friends have struggled [via TAFE] to get into university. At the same age that they get their qualifications, I will have two trades'. Despite topping the class in his first year of auto electrical, he has elected not to seek a shortened indenture because 'it would have meant missing out on all the job experience'.

Summary

With a total workforce approaching 800 people, Gough and Gilmour Holdings employs 450 (55%) qualified tradespersons and 150 (20%) apprentices—of whom 10 (7%) are adults. Recruitment of apprentices, including assessment of aptitudes and physical health, is conducted at branch level in accordance with company policies. Although all apprentices are appointed strictly on merit, the company does see benefit in adult apprentices. One of these benefits is the very high retention rate of adults in GGH after apprenticeship.

Its workforce being highly trade intensive, GGH has experienced a persistent shortage of qualified tradespersons in recent years and would welcome more adults into apprenticeship. However, few apply, the most likely reason being the low adult apprentice pay rate. Adult apprentices, because of their maturity and reliability, better fit the image the company seeks to promote when interacting with customers in the field. The adult apprentices do not appear to experience any significant difficulties in their training, either on or off the job.

The apprentice interviewed was undertaking a second apprenticeship under his own initiative, being appointed to GGH from outside the company. He hoped completion of a second apprenticeship would enhance his attractiveness to employers and hence his job security and earning ability. A 50% drop in wages upon entering apprenticeship was seen as a worthwhile sacrifice to achieve this goal.

Date of study: Fourth quarter, 2001

Adult pathways in metal and electrical trades: Crane Copper Tube, NSW

Crane Copper Tube (CCT), in Penrith NSW, is a division of Crane Enfield Metals, specialising in the manufacture of copper tube and aluminium extrusions. Commencing operations in 1959, this wholly Australian-owned company supplies copper and aluminium products manufactured to national and international standards to overseas and domestic markets.

Employer training perspective

CCT employs 340 workers at Penrith of whom 40 (12%) are qualified tradespersons and 17 are apprentices (16 male and 1 female). The two main trades are mechanical fitter (ASCO 4112) and electrician (ASCO 4311). Four (25%) of the 17 apprentices are male adults, one in his mid-twenties, two in their thirties, and one in his forties. Due to substantial restructuring, the number of apprenticeships offered by the company in the next two to three years is unlikely to increase. New adult apprenticeships in this period are unlikely to exceed one a year.

Selection and training processes

Until 2000, CCT conducted its own apprentice recruitment. A recruitment agency now does initial selections and gives CCT a short-list for consideration. (CCT does not take part in group training schemes.) Apprentices are moved around various plants for experience. Electrical apprentices spend time with outside contractors, for domestic electrical experience.

The company is moving towards training and employing 'dual-ticketed' tradespersons, qualified in both fitting and electrical trades, with all 13 junior apprentices currently heading down this path. However, the four adult apprentices have elected to qualify in one trade only—a decision supported by the company which does not wish to see the employees, so long out of study and with home and family commitments, over-extend themselves.

CCT envisages more 'maintainer–operators' in the company (and in industry generally) in coming years—employees who operate a machine and also maintain and repair it as tradespersons. The concept is attractive as a means of increasing operating efficiencies. If implemented, it might open up apprenticeship opportunities for adult plant operators.

Adults (over-25s)

The four adult apprentices were employed as trades assistants before embarking on apprenticeships. Apprenticeship was one of several alternatives offered to employees whose jobs were affected by restructuring. There are two apprentice electricians and two mechanical fitters. All are undertaking a full four-year indenture term with no credit sought in off-the-job training. In accordance with their industrial agreement, their wage rates did not drop to the adult apprentice rate upon entering apprenticeship. The two apprentices interviewed would not have been able to take up an apprenticeship had such a drop in wages been applied.

The experience of CCT is that adult apprentices appreciate the opportunity and are highly committed to succeeding. They are role models for younger apprentices in the workplace.

Supervisors in the workshop initially had some difficulty adjusting to adult apprentices—still seeing them as trades assistants rather than first-year apprentices. Some adult apprentices also had to adjust—tending to the view that, as former trades assistants, they 'knew it all'. Once these early misconceptions disappeared, other problems were not encountered.

In offering apprenticeships to these employees, the company took precautions to ensure that they would be able to handle the study involved. Several tests previously used by the company for selecting apprentices were used in this process.

Provider and apprentice perspective

Two apprentices were interviewed. One is 38 years of age and married with children. After finishing Year 10 at school, he completed an apprenticeship as a blacksmith with the navy. He found employment with CCT, first as a production operator and then trades assistant. When his position became redundant, he accepted an electrical apprenticeship.

The second apprentice, an early school leaver, is 28 years and married with one child. After various jobs, he began applying regularly for work with CCT, finally landing a production worker job. After six months he became a trades assistant and was offered an apprenticeship as a mechanical fitter when his position became redundant. Now both in their third year, these employees are pleased with their apprenticeships, as illustrated by the comment: 'Just when I thought it was too late, this opportunity came up. I have never looked back since'.

Both apprentices had picked up a variety of non-trade vocational qualifications in their pre-apprenticeship careers, mostly while working with CCT. These included: occupational health and safety (OH&S), working in confined spaces, various crane tickets, elevator work platform, forklift operator, and senior first-aider. Although most qualifications could not be credited towards the trade qualification, they contributed to the value of these employees to the company.

Both apprentices noted that, although their TAFE training was the same as that of junior apprentices, teachers respected their maturity, allowing them to work under less supervision and seek help at their discretion. This could be a disadvantage when teachers incorrectly assumed they possessed particular knowledge or experience. The fitting apprentice commented that his age and work experience gave him confidence to speak up and seek help from others when he needed it—something he was never able to do when younger.

From the TAFE perspective, adult apprentices are very good students. As well as being a steadying influence on their class, some were able to convey to younger students the value of apprenticeship, saying how much they appreciated the chance to pick up the opportunity lost earlier in their lives. Perhaps understandably, junior apprentices were more inclined to heed this sort of message from a fellow apprentice than from a teacher.

In the opinion of a TAFE spokesperson (electrical trades), the need to find employment to match training available from the institute was one of the most significant blockages to adult apprenticeship. Adults regularly approached the institute seeking trade courses only to be informed that, without workplace experience, the study would be of little value. A government bureau or other agency to help adults find suitable employers was suggested. The relatively low rate of pay for adult apprenticeship was also seen as an impediment.

Summary

Crane Copper Tube employs 340 people including 40 tradespersons and 17 apprentices. Four of the apprentices are over 25, all employed as trades assistants before apprenticeship. Their work backgrounds include various vocational competencies complementing the chosen trade.

All the adult apprentices perceived their apprenticeships as valuable career progressions. CCT confirmed that apprentices were appreciative of the opportunity, and highly committed to succeeding. Adults acted as role models for the younger apprentices in the workplace. Before inducting the adults into apprenticeship, CCT interviewed and tested them to ensure they would not run into difficulties with their off-the-job training.

The TAFE institute echoed employer comments regarding commitment of the adults and their beneficial influence on younger apprentices. The institute identified two blockages to apprenticeship of adults: the difficulty in finding employers willing to take on an adult apprentice, and the financial disincentive arising from the drop in wages.

Date of study: Fourth quarter, 2001

Adult pathways in the metal and electrical trades: A Victorian auto components supplier

This company mainly operates in the industry class Automotive Electrical and Instrument Manufacturing (ANZSIC 2813), designing and producing essential auto electric components. The company employs some 2000 people, including about 260 (13%) tradespersons or apprentices in metal and electrical trades.

Employer training perspective

The training manager directs all apprentice training. The company is a registered training organisation (RTO) conducting basic off-the-job training itself for apprentices. It is also working with Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT), a 'dual-sector' university and VET institution, to develop further study pathways (diploma and above) for the better apprentices.

There are currently about 200 qualified tradespersons and nearly 60 apprentices with the company. Most (46) apprentices are in mechanical trades (ASCO 411) with the remainder (13) in electrical trades (ASCO 431).

Selection and training processes

The company tests prospective recruits on basic maths and communication skills to establish their behavioural competencies. Most of the successful applicants are male school-leavers with Year 11–12 qualifications. Some adults (over-25s or younger adults), not normally existing company employees, may also be taken on.

Under the present company model, apprentices go through about 80–85% of a 'standard' apprenticeship as it might flow from the Metals or Electrotechnology Training Packages. There is some mixing of basic mechanical and electrical competencies, supplemented by extra project and office work to capture useful competencies in computer-aided design, industrial engineering, maintenance methods, or in specific technologies (for example, diode manufacture).

The company monitors apprentices closely in terms of their application of competencies, feedback from customers, individual assessments and marks, and successful progression through apprenticeship to jobs inside or outside the company.

Generally, apprentices are not accelerated through the standard competencies or the apprentice wage levels. Rather, the incentive is to achieve higher results and a more impressive resume on completion of the four-year term.

Training innovations and blockages

The company is little concerned with the roles of new apprenticeships centres and employer incentives, but sees the present training packages and competency parameters as limiting. It proposes to introduce a more diverse 'mechatronics' training model attuned to the company's manufacturing prospects and skill development needs.

Metals and electrotechnology, and other, elements are to be combined in a new program to produce all-round tradespersons capable of improving company technologies and progressing to higher levels. RMIT may assist in developing these post-trade and technological skills.

The company sees barriers to technology-driven training innovation in poor government support for post-basic (diploma and degree) training, little provision of infrastructure or equipment to companies, and poor incentives for would-be industry trainers in companies. Specifically, it urges government scholarship support for industry experts to undertake graduate studies, to skill them as expert trade and technology teachers for industry.

Adults (over-25s)

About five of the 60 apprentices are over 25 (8% of total), a little less than the over-25s national average share in metal-electrical trades, but another 30 are in their early 20s. The company reports about 95–100% completion rate with all apprentices. The emphasis on post-trade career and study opportunities is a strong incentive for completion, also a particular incentive for would-be adult apprentices.

The company expects that adult apprentices may gain general market share over the next couple of years, but if anything lose in their share of company apprenticeships. This is partly because the mechatronics model will target younger apprentices, also due to higher costs for the company and low apprentice wages for adults.

Over-25s receive the same mix of theoretical training, project work and assessment as under-25 apprentices. The company finds that adult apprentices may have clear direction, but this may not be complemented by a sound work ethic.

Provider and apprentice perspective

As its own RTO, the company is taking the opportunity to test training models (mechatronics) that merge the boundaries of training packages and look more to post-trade careers and opportunities for promising recruits. It could be said that curriculum development, trainer professionalism, and infrastructure support feature more strongly in the company's ideal model than they do in the Australian apprenticeship funding model.

RMIT, which is working with the company on further study pathways post-trade, makes the point that able adult apprentices could also be developed into TAFE teachers in the trades.

Adult apprentices surveyed see a number of benefits in being with the company. They appreciate the career and earnings opportunities on offer. One or two comment that prior university education has not given them the start they needed, with the mature-age apprenticeship now offering a valuable chance to get lives and careers back on track.

Summary

The company is a high-technology enterprise with an established training ethos and a particular interest in post-trade and technology-driven training for apprentices. About five (8%) of its 60 metal-electrical apprentices are over 25, with another 30 in the 21–25 bracket.

The company mainly recruits school leavers with Year 11–12 for apprenticeships, with a few in the over-25 age group. It is a little below the national averages in terms of adult (over-25) apprentices, but well above average in terms of (all-age) completions.

Over-25 apprentices may lose slightly in their share of places as the company moves to the integrated 'mechatronics' training model and increasingly targets Year 11–12 school leavers. However, if adult apprentices are 'second-chance' university graduates, the mechatronics model and the involvement of RMIT in post-trade pathways may draw them in.

The company illustrates the issues that may occur if an employer wants to offer a technology-driven training model with more diverse learning and career opportunities within and beyond the trade. It proposes that better infrastructure and industry-trainer support from government is needed in order to develop that kind of model.

Date of study: Third quarter, 2001

Adult pathways in the trades: Melbourne East Group Training, Melbourne

Melbourne East Group Training (MEGT) is headquartered at Ringwood in suburban Melbourne and has another dozen sub-offices around Melbourne. It operates a large group training scheme (the subject of this report) for a variety of trades, also other employment and training services including a registered training organisation and a new apprenticeships centre.

Employer (scheme) training perspective

Training of apprentices is managed by MEGT training and field staff. Various Melbourne TAFE colleges, depending on the trade, serve as RTOs for MEGT off-the-job training. MEGT has about 720 apprentices and trainees, including 400 apprentices. They fall into groups of 50 (metals), 62 (auto), 90 (electrical), and 200 (construction). The 'metals' group includes fitters (ASCO 4112), refrigeration mechanics (ASCO 4312) and printers (ASCO 4912).

MEGT accepts approaches from prospective host employers and apprentices in the trades generally, and may advertise apprentice vacancies on its website. These might include (examples from October 2001) an advertisement on behalf of a Melbourne firm seeking a first-year stainless steel fabrication apprentice, or another seeking out-of-trade electrical apprentices to be re-employed by MEGT directly and made available to host employers.

Adults (over-25s)

Of the current group of 400 apprentices, 23 (6%) are over 21. There are three in metals, three in auto, five in electrical and 12 in construction. Nine (2%) of the 400 are over 25, below the over-25s national average share in trades generally. MEGT estimates a 75% completion rate for its (over-25) apprentices. The number of apprentices, and over-25 apprentices, is expected to remain much the same over the next couple of years.

MEGT comments that the system works well for the over-25s, in areas where they are allowed to progress more quickly. Adult apprentices have the advantage of maturity and are 'more appreciative' of the efforts made on their behalf.

Only MEGT's adult metals and auto apprentices, not electrical and construction, automatically go on to an adult rate. Where there is an adult award, this may make it harder for MEGT to re-place the apprentices when they need to change hosts. Conversely, where no adult wage is prescribed, this may make it harder for the apprentices to survive on the applicable wage, especially in the first year of training. While an adult rate in all awards might, in theory, increase adult participation, it would not suit the operations of MEGT.

Summary

MEGT is a large group training scheme servicing metal, auto, electrical and building trades in the Melbourne area. It has about 400 apprentices, 23 (6%) over 21 and nine (2%) over 25.

MEGT expects that its (adult) apprentice numbers will be maintained over the next couple of years. Adults' maturity and attitude is an asset. Areas with adult awards (metals and auto) may tend to suit apprentices if they can find an initial host employer, but the higher rates may make it harder for MEGT to rotate apprentices to other host employers.

Date of study: Fourth quarter, 2001

Adult pathways in aero trades: Flight West, Queensland

This Queensland-based company operates in the industry class Scheduled Domestic Air Transport (ANZSIC 6402), as a commuter airline around Queensland regional ports.

The company employs over 250 people. Across all ports served, this includes 60 (24%) tradespersons or apprentices in aircraft mechanics and avionics(1).

Employer training perspective

The training manager directs all apprentice training. Aviation Training for Aviation Engineers (ATAE), a training company servicing general aviation employers in Queensland, conducts all the off-the-job training.

Flight West employs 45 licensed aircraft maintenance engineers (LAME) (ASCO 4114). There are 15 apprentices, or 33% of the LAME pool. Of these 15, 12 are in aircraft mechanics and the remainder in 'avionics' or aircraft systems.

Selection and training processes

The company does not conduct an active recruitment process, receiving about 80 resumes a year from its listing in the Queensland Department of Education annual 'Employment avenues'.

Prospective recruits sit a science and aviation entrance exam and after further interview about five candidates (four in mechanical and one avionics) are offered apprenticeships each year.

Some of the successful applicants enter direct from Year 12, but the company actually prefers graduates from pre-vocational programs (including ATAE). Adults, not existing company employees, are occasionally taken on. The Queensland Apprenticeships Centre serves as the new apprenticeships centre for the company and its apprentices.

Apprentices go through 'traditional' training pathways as prescribed in the National Aeroskills Training Package. ATAE provides the off-the-job training in blocks of 2x5 weeks over three years. Aviation trades are rated as certificate IV qualifications (many trades are certificate III) on the basis of the high skills and safety requirements. Apprentices are not accelerated through the standard competencies or apprentice wage levels, but may receive some credit up-front for pre-vocational studies or prior learning.

Adults (over-25s)

Three of the 15 Flight West apprentices are over 25 (20% of total), more than the over-25s national average share in metal–electrical trades, and another six are in their early 20s. Relying on its good reputation and exhaustive apprentice screening, the company reports about 100% completion rate for all apprentices.

---

1 Employment and training numbers since affected by the Ansett Airlines collapse

Flight West expects that adults may gain a higher market share of aircraft maintenance apprenticeships over the next couple of years, and similarly within the company. One factor is that increasing numbers of Year 12s with strong maths/physics/English, after entering university or TAFE, may seek new careers for themselves after finding those pathways unsuitable.

Company and ATAE policy is that over-25s receive the same kind of training as their younger colleagues. The traditional pathways are seen to offer the best all-round training for all apprentices.

Provider and apprentice perspective

ATAE was established about three years ago when Southbank TAFE in Brisbane withdrew from aviation training. It is based at Archerfield near Brisbane, but also provides pre-apprenticeships in Cairns in partnership with Tropical North Queensland TAFE and Cairns Region Group Training.

The ATAE apprentice base has grown from about a dozen to about 80, including the 15 Flight West apprentices, and it also conducts two or three pre-apprentice (certificate II) classes each year. Fourteen of the current ATAE apprentices and pre-apprentices are over 25. The positive features of the over-25s group are stronger commitment and motivation, mature outlook and stabilising effect on younger classmates, and (generally) previous trade experience and good attention to maintenance details.

As noted, the Flight West adult apprentices are often disillusioned university or TAFE students. Aircraft maintenance is a prestigious trade option for such students. They may envisage that they can pick up their previous courses post-trade. In fact, the company reports that two previous apprentices have continued on through university to become professional aeronautical engineers.

Summary

Flight West is highly reliant on its skilled workforce of LAMEs and apprentices, who represent a quarter of total company employment. Three (20%) of its 15 aircraft apprentices are over 25, with another six in the 21–25 age bracket.

The company mainly recruits pre-vocational graduates, or school-leavers, with good Year 12 results as apprentices, with a few in the over-25 age group. All adult apprentices complete training, and the company expects that their numbers may climb over the next couple of years.

The off-the-job provider, ATAE, notes a number of positives with older apprentices from Flight West and in the industry generally. These include motivation, maturity, stabilising effect on young colleagues, previous experience, and (highly desirable) an attention to maintenance detail. Often, the older Flight West apprentices have left unsatisfying university or TAFE studies and turned to aircraft maintenance as a prestigious trade option.

A traditional apprenticeship pathway is the norm for older and younger apprentices. Off-the-job training is provided on five-week periods of block release.

Date of study: Third quarter, 2001

Adult pathways in the building trades: Building Industry Group Apprenticeships, Brisbane

Based in suburban Brisbane, Building Industry Group Apprenticeships (BIGA) operates a large group training scheme across all major building trades on behalf of the local industry. BIGA itself employs about 80 people, about one staff per seven apprentices or trainees.

BIGA's Construction Division is usually the legal employer of the apprentices and trainees, numbering well over 550, who work on rotations with local building firms that serve as the 'host employers' for the scheme.

Employer (scheme) training perspective

Training of apprentices is managed by BIGA training and field officers and by the training manager of the associated Academy of Building and Construction. The academy serves as the registered training organisation for all BIGA off-the-job training.

Currently, BIGA has 548 apprentices and 23 trainees. Over 50% (290) of the apprentices are in carpentry and joinery (ASCO 4411). All major building trades (ASCO 44) are represented, plus associated trades in cabinetmaking and electrical. Apart from carpentry and joinery, the main apprentice groups are cabinetmaking (66), painting (53), bricklaying (41), wall and floor tiling (38), fibrous and solid plastering (33), plumbing (16) and electrical trades (10).

Selection processes

Apprentices can come to BIGA following participation in VET-in-Schools programs, through direct entry to the industry via an apprenticeship (preferably following a pre-vocational program), or as an 'out-of-trade' apprentice.

Currently, pre-vocational graduates or successful school-based apprentices are the preferred recruits for BIGA apprenticeships. Likely apprentices may be recommended to or assessed by training officers at BIGA, which tests literacy and numeracy standards of all candidates.

Training intermediaries and incentives

Commonwealth (Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs) employer incentives usually flow directly to BIGA as the legal employer. The Queensland Government's Building and Construction Industry Training Fund is also accessed for incentive funding.

As it is compulsory, the new apprenticeship centres (NACs) are used for their duly appointed Commonwealth and State apprenticeship administrative functions. BIGA comments that it could equally carry out these NAC functions for itself.

Training arrangements

BIGA endorses the competency-based approach to apprenticeship training, but also supports a set time component. Most of its apprentices do close to a four-year term. To suit industry needs, off-the-job training is conducted over short periods rather than on block release. On-the-job projects reinforce the theory of particular competencies or modules.

While on their job rotations, apprentices are visited quarterly by BIGA field officers. The visits allow for discussion of training and employment issues, employer ratings of apprentices and BIGA and, conversely, apprentice ratings of on- and off-the-job training.

The scheme is a strong supporter of VET-in-Schools programs. Year 11 students can do a pre-vocational program one day a week. Successful pre-vocational students can then undertake school-based apprenticeships in Year 12, with one day a week for training and one day a week at work. School apprentices continue on full-time after Year 12, usually for three more years.

Adults (over-25s)

Of the current group of 548 apprentices, 42 are over 25 (8% of total, close to the over-25s national average share in building trades). Anecdotally, BIGA estimates a 50% completion rate for its over-25 apprentices, but a similar estimate applies to BIGA apprentices generally.

While their younger counterparts may be single or still living at home, the adult apprentices may have family or financial responsibilities that make it very difficult to survive on the applicable wages.

BIGA expects that its apprentice aggregate may increase over the next couple of years with a pickup after an industry downturn. However, it also expects that the over-25 apprentices may lose industry share and their share of BIGA apprenticeships.

While adult apprentices may have the advantage of maturity, the cost of adult wages is perceived to be too high for the market. It is difficult to sell employers adult apprentices with limited skills (that is, pre-vocational skills) and at much higher (from the employer's perspective) wages. BIGA comments that some form of government wage subsidy might be applied to offset the extra wage payable to adults.

Provider and apprentice perspective

The academy neither encourages nor refuses adults (over-21s or over-25s) who wish to take up pre-vocational courses, the preferred route into a BIGA apprenticeship. 'The reality,' comments the Academy, 'is that they are less inclined to gain employment due to the higher cost to employers'.

Although some adult apprentices may have industry skills indicating RPL as an option, the academy does not usually find age a good indicator of individual training needs or learning capacities. That is not to deny the 'life skills' and leadership capacities of older apprentices.

The academy reports that adult apprentices come from all backgrounds, including professionals, ex-labourers, and unemployed people. Were they to seek apprenticeship with individual employers, the potential employer could be younger than the would-be apprentice, potentially creating friction, but this is not such an issue for a group scheme.

Summary

BIGA is a large group training scheme servicing all major trades in the Brisbane building industry. Forty-two (8%) of its 548 building apprentices are over 25.

BIGA prefers to recruit school leavers who have undertaken pre-vocational courses or school-based apprenticeships for its apprenticeship intakes, but does not rule out over-25s, especially if they are prepared to undertake pre-vocational courses. The scheme is about on par with the national construction trade averages in terms of adult (over-25) apprentices, but below average in terms of (all-age) completions.

BIGA is not optimistic that over-25s will maintain their share of places in the scheme over the next couple of years. While their maturity is an asset, they do not usually offer increased learning potential compared to younger recruits, and the required adult wage is a strong disincentive to employers. High adult wages, comments BIGA, could be offset by some form of government wage subsidy. Also, the scheme could assume the NAC role for itself.

Date of study: Third quarter, 2001

Adult pathways in metal and electrical trades: Hamersley Iron, WA

A major world producer in Iron Ore Mining (ANZSCI 1311), Hamersley Iron produces 52 million tons annually in the Pilbara of Western Australia. Most business being conducted in remote inland locations, many employees live in mining towns near mine sites. Remoteness and 'company town' social structures present special problems in apprentice training.

Employer training perspective

Hamersley employs more than 2200 people, including about 850 qualified tradespersons and 109 apprentices. As an 'all staff' company, Hamersley does not classify employee occupations by trade, as would be the case under an award. Rather than being classified as a 'fitter' or 'electrician', a trade employee would be referred to as a 'maintainer'. In broad terms, the trade employees fall into two major groups: mechanical engineering (ASCO 411)—about 700 employees—and electrical and electronics tradespersons (ASCO 431)—about 150.

Selection and training processes

Hamersley has a 30-year tradition of employing adults as apprentices. Of the current 109 apprentices, five (5%) are adults. Up until now, all adult apprentices have been recruited from existing employees, to extend company skill resources and foster individual careers. As apprentices, these adults retain normal salaries and benefits, and the company retains their positions. TAFE has been the off-the-job training provider for the adult apprentices, but this may shift to the Chamber of Commerce and Industry in WA (CCIWA) in future.

About 1995, Hamersley stopped recruiting its own junior apprentices and contracted CCIWA to manage apprentice recruitment and training programs. For all its juniors, Hamersley now acts as a host employer for the CCIWA group training scheme, with CCIWA providing their statutory off-the-job training. About 25% of all CCIWA apprentices work for Hamersley.

In its 2002 apprenticeship policy, Hamersley has asked CCIWA for an adult (particularly females) recruitment strategy. The perception is that many female spouses (and other family members) in mining towns would like to work, but are unable to do so because there are few enterprises and job opportunities. If family members can find work, more families may be influenced to stay on in town, increasing stability in the workforce and town community.

Adults (over-25s)

Hamersley supports the concept of adult apprenticeship. There are a number of advantages in drawing adult apprentices from staff:

- Company profiling shows adult apprentices are a lower risk group from an OH&S standpoint, an important consideration in the mining industry.
- Adult apprentices drawn from employee ranks are already acquainted with the company culture, standards of behaviour and safety systems.
- With previous company experience, existing employees have good prospects of completing training in shorter time and reducing their terms of indenture.
- The company already has a good picture of the prospective apprentice, whose attributes can be verified by supervising personnel and from employee records.

In the words of a company spokesperson, they (adults) are 'ready to roll'. With their greater stability and maturity, adults in an apprentice intake can positively influence safety and performance in the group as a whole. Offers of apprenticeship may extend to adults who are not company employees, including, as noted above, spouses and other family members.

Hamersley expects a worsening shortage of skilled labour in industry over the next few years. This will create an urgent need for accelerated training, which could operate to the advantage of adults seeking training through apprenticeships. With their greater maturity, focus, and industrial experience, adults should be able to complete their training more quickly.

Thus, the proportion of adults in apprenticeship with Hamersley may increase over the next few years. However, unless there is more funding for apprenticeships, growth in total numbers is unlikely. Any increase in adult numbers is likely to result in fewer juniors.

From Hamersley's perspective, the only significant blockage to adult apprenticeship is the drop in pay, as might apply to adults forgoing full-pay jobs to be apprenticed by CCIWA and work at Hamersley. This is not an issue for Hamersley employees, who retain their previous salary as apprentices, or for unemployed mining town residents who take up apprenticeships.

Provider and apprentice perspective

The apprentice interviewed was 31 years of age and married with two children. He began with Hamersley in 1986 as a trained boilermaker. After moving into the fitting section, he took the opportunity to obtain formal fitting qualifications through apprenticeship. With his experience, he received credit for all stage 1 training and part of stage 2. His term of indenture was reduced by about 15 months, and he completed his apprenticeship in 2001.

The apprentice did not notice major differences in treatment in his workplace or TAFE training. TAFE teachers tended to let him 'do things his way', on the understanding that he would seek advice where necessary. On some occasions, teachers would pair younger 'problem' students with him, using him as a role model and steadying influence.

TAFE training for adults is essentially the same as for juniors. TAFE confirmed the apprentice's view that (some) adults could set a positive example for juniors, raising class standards by participation in learning activities. Adults with industrial experience often completed two-week blocks of training ahead of schedule, returning to work a few days early.

The trainer noted that, having adopted stringent drug policies to satisfy OH&S obligations, some companies find that a significant proportion of apprentices struggle to pass a drug test. Adults, who may be less likely to offend, become a more attractive apprentice proposition.

Summary

Hamersley Iron, a major world iron-ore producer, employs more than 2200 people. Nearly half (850 qualified tradespersons and over 100 apprentices) are in metal and electrical trade categories. Training is fairly traditional in nature, although adults can shorten their terms significantly. Up until now, TAFE has trained the adult apprentices and CCIWA the juniors.

Five apprentices, all previously company employees, are adults. All junior apprentices are employed under the CCIWA group training scheme, Hamersley acting as a host employer. Most Hamersley employees and their families live in remote mining towns near mine sites. One recruitment strategy under consideration is to offer adult apprenticeships to (female) spouses, thus providing them with welcome employment opportunities.

Recruitment and off-job training of Hamersley's junior apprentices is undertaken by CCIWA. Adult apprentice training is also likely to shift from TAFE to CCIWA, as the latter takes over recruitment of adult apprentices for Hamersley. Both Hamersley and the TAFE provider see adults as offering benefits of maturity and stability and, if they come with some industrial background, the ability to complete training and their indentures in shorter time than juniors. With evident shortages of skilled labour expected to become acute over the next few years, these attributes could operate to the advantage of prospective adult apprentices.

Date of study: Third quarter, 2001

Adult pathways in metal and electrical trades: Wesfarmers CSBP, WA

Wesfarmers CSBP, a division of Wesfarmers in Western Australia, is the major supplier of fertilisers and chemicals (Basic Chemical Manufacturing, ANZSIC 253) to Western Australia's

agricultural, mining and industrial sectors. CSBP operates a large fertiliser and chemicals complex at Kwinana, south of Perth, and other facilities at the regional WA ports of Bunbury, Albany and Esperance.

Employer training perspective

Of the 570 employees at CSBP, about 40 are qualified tradespersons, mainly mechanical fitters (ASCO 4112) and electricians (ASCO 4311). Many of these are 'dual-ticketed', or qualified in two trades. There are nine apprentices, one an adult completing stage two of training. Over the past 18 months, four other adults have completed apprenticeships.

Selection and training processes

CSBP junior apprentices are group training scheme employees of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia (CCIWA), with CSBP acting as host employer. The five adult apprentices were employees of CSBP before, and during, their apprenticeships.

Following outsourcing of apprenticeships to CCIWA, it now provides all off-the-job training for CSBP junior apprentices. However, both TAFE and CCIWA have provided off-the-job training for the five adult apprentices.

Having dried up the pool of suitable employees from which to draw adult apprentices, the company does not expect to appoint any more in the immediate future.

Adults (over-25s)

Two of the five adult apprentices were instrument mechanics, offered apprenticeships to enable them to qualify as A-grade electricians and so become 'dual-ticketed' employees. The other three were trades assistants apprenticed as mechanical fitters. During training, all remained on the adult wage they had received before apprenticeship.

Both CSBP and the adult apprentices commented on difficulties encountered in putting adult apprenticeships into practice. For example, there was uncertainty about which stage of the apprenticeship should be the starting point, and some training was repeated because of misunderstandings. To CSBP there appeared to be a lot of 'red tape'. The company and the apprentices would like to see clearly documented procedures for implementing adult apprenticeships. Despite these reservations, CSBP regards adult apprenticeship as an important tool for addressing a growing shortage of qualified tradespersons in industry.

CSBP sees adult apprenticeship as a valuable avenue of career development for employees. The company gains greater flexibility, either through multi-skilling or simply by increasing the number of qualified personnel in a work area. The maturity and experience of adults allows them to be given training tasks requiring care and responsibility, attributes that make them attractive apprenticeship propositions. The only noteworthy disadvantage is that adults can be 'set in their ways' and therefore resistant to learning new ways of doing things.

Provider and apprentice perspective

Two apprentices were interviewed for this study. One, 37 years of age, was married with two young children, and the other 40 years, married with three children. Both were CSBP employees for some years before being apprenticed as mechanical fitters. Neither had any major vocational qualifications although, between them, they had accumulated certificates in rigging, scaffolding, forklift operation, crane driving and fibre-glassing. Both had moved through various CSBP jobs to the point where they were working as trade assistants to fitters.

TAFE provided most off-the-job training, with some additional training and on-the-job assessment from CCIWA. Both apprentices completed most of their off-job training over a period of about three years before entering apprenticeship. The apprenticeship, which lasted about one year, served to formalise their achievements. Both were somewhat disheartened by the drawn-out nature of the process they followed to reach their goal.

Responsibility for determining their off-job training requirements and then enrolling in appropriate modules of study rested largely with the apprentices themselves. CSBP allowed them to take time off work to attend college (on a day-release basis) with the expectation they would make up lost time where possible. Upon successful completion of each module of study, the company reimbursed the apprentices for their study costs. Both apprentices were satisfied with the treatment they received from the training providers, TAFE and CCIWA.

TAFE teachers looked favourably on the presence of adults in their courses. Adult apprentices, they said, exerted a positive influence on other class members through their contributions and behaviour in class. Some teachers said they used adult apprentices as mentors to other students. Where practicable, teachers modified their teaching to take account of the ability of some adults to progress faster than juniors. Conversely, there were also adults who needed discreet assistance to compensate for poor literacy and numeracy arising from schooling inadequacies in earlier years.

The TAFE provider was optimistic about the prospects for adult apprenticeship. A major industry training council was said to be considering trades assistants and other mature-aged people in the workforce as a means of alleviating skill shortages expected over the next few years. Adults who, because of their industry experience, possessed potential for accelerated learning and shortened indenture periods were favourably placed to benefit from such a scheme.

Summary

Wesfarmers CSBP, a WA manufacturer of fertilisers and chemicals, employs almost 600 people including 40 tradespersons and nine apprentices. Of five adults who have trained as apprentices, four have completed their apprenticeships over the past 18 months and one is still in training. All of the adult apprentices were CSBP employees, two using apprenticeship to obtain a second trade qualification and three upgrading their skills from trade assistant. In the latter group, two mentioned the lengthy process (four years in total) to upgrade.

CSBP and the TAFE training provider believe apprenticeship of adults, particularly those with industry experience, could play a significant role in alleviating projected shortages in skilled labour over the next few years. In such circumstances, adults with industrial experience are well-placed to benefit from apprenticeship opportunities arising. However, CSBP itself has exhausted its current pool of suitable employees for adult apprenticeships.

For companies and individuals to reap maximum benefit from adult apprenticeships, CSBP and its adult apprentices believe that the provisions for adult apprenticeships must be well-publicised and the implementation procedures clearly stated.

Date of study: Third quarter, 2001

Adult pathways in electrical trades: Westpower Services, WA

Employing 2600 people, Western Power operates in Electricity Supply (ANZSIC 3610) as the major generator of electrical energy in Western Australia, its four major power stations and 31 smaller stations representing almost 60% of WA generation capacity. Westpower Services, a

branch of Western Power, is responsible for construction and maintenance of the high-voltage power network across WA.

Employer training perspective

Westpower employs about 300 people, 60 (20%) of whom are qualified in trades associated with high-voltage transmission. Many of these tradespersons are 'dual-ticketed'; that is, qualified in two trades. These dual trades include electrical lines trades, cable jointing (both ASCO 4313) and general electricians (ASCO 4311). In addition to those qualified in trades, Westpower employs 21 apprentices, of whom seven (33%) are adults.

Selection and training processes

In the past, the Chamber of Commerce of Western Australia (CCIWA) and various TAFE colleges provided off-job training for Westpower apprentices. CCIWA is now the sole provider. Westpower and CCIWA select apprentices through aptitude testing and interview. Students attend CCIWA periodically for two-week blocks of training. The training format is similar for adult and junior apprentices.

Westpower encourages apprentices to seek recognition of current competencies and, for those who have performed satisfactorily, to apply for a reduction in the term of indenture. Should the apprentices want an early sign-off, the company will lodge applications on their behalf. Reductions of six months are typical, reducing the term to three-and-one-half years. While these reductions may have special relevance for adult apprentices, they also apply to juniors.

Adults (over-25s)

Of its seven adult apprentices, Westpower previously employed five in another capacity; two as boilermakers and three as trades assistants. They accepted apprenticeships as an alternative to redundancy brought about by restructuring. All five are pleased with the outcome. One, a 58-year-old, reportedly said it was 'the best thing he ever did'.

The remaining two adult apprentices were taken on via the CCIWA group training scheme as part of Westpower's normal yearly intakes. On average, Westpower takes about four new apprentices a year, one usually being an adult. With extra adults taken on to stave off redundancies, the number of adult apprentices in training has grown over the past three years. Usually, about four (or 20%) of the total number of apprentices would be adults.

Ages of adult apprentices working at Westpower range from early 20s to late 50s. The success rate for all Westpower apprentices is virtually 100%. With greater acceptance of the adult apprentice concept, Westpower believes that their proportions across the industry have steadily increased over the past five years, but that the industry (and company) trend has now levelled out. By contrast, CCIWA expects the proportion of adults in apprenticeship to continue to grow moderately over the next few years.

Although Westpower does not see adults to offer major advantages over carefully selected juniors, they note importance differences. Adult apprentices often come with prior industrial experience, including workplace knowledge and familiarity with OH&S matters. This maturity shows up in greater caution and care—an asset for work dealing with high voltage electricity. However, they tend to be slower in their work—most noticeable for apprentices in their 50s. Adults are more likely to question procedures and other aspects of their jobs, but this usefully prompts review and improvement of practices.

Low wages are seen as the main blockage to adult apprenticeship. With greater demands on their income than juniors, adults struggle to live on the lower pay of apprentices. Strategies to counter this problem include: granting of special overtime or country work at a higher rate; (if existing

employees) remaining on the previous wage; taking on additional casual work (the apprentice interviewed below still did some sound engineering work); and, the apprentice's spouse becoming a significant wage earner during the apprenticeship.

Provider and apprentice perspective

CCIWA notes that adults tend to have clearer goals and motivations than juniors, and can be relied on more to complete set work. These attributes could be, but have not been, used to expedite training. This will change as training delivery in electrical technology is reformed over the next three years—using training packages, modules, competency-based learning, and greater emphasis on training in the workplace. Adult apprentices, with their greater motivation and prior experience, should be able to move more quickly through training and reduce their apprenticeship terms.

The training provider finds that adults 'blend' very well into the training environment. They are an asset in class, their experience enabling them to generate and contribute to productive class discussions, and their maturity having a beneficial influence on younger class members.

The second-year apprentice interviewed for this study was one of the two (see above) not previously employed by Westpower. He is with the CCIWA scheme but is expected to complete his entire apprenticeship working at the Westpower plant, training as an electrical fitter specialising in high-voltage equipment.

This apprentice is 25, partnered and purchasing a house, and previously had casual employment as a sound engineer. After undertaking a pre-apprenticeship course with TAFE, he secured the apprenticeship with CCIWA. His primary motives for the apprenticeship are to obtain a qualification and steady employment.

The apprentice has not noticed any special treatment by the employer or training provider. He attributes any minor differences that occur to differences in ability and attitude rather than age, pointing out that similar minor differences in treatment are also observable between junior apprentices. One minor negative was the tendency of some TAFE teachers (in his pre-apprenticeship) to 'treat him like a 17-year-old' rather than an as adult.

Summary

Westpower Services, a branch of Western Power, looks after the high-voltage transmission network across WA. It is skill and trade intensive, the workforce of 300 including 60 qualified tradespersons and 21 apprentices. The adult share of company training is higher than the national average, seven (33%) of the 21 apprentices being adults ranging in age from early-20s to late-50s. Of these, five were previously employees of the company.

The training provider, CCIWA, sees some further prospects for growth in adult apprenticeships. Low adult apprentice wages are a barrier, but adults already employed may retain their previous company wage as apprentices. Westpower observes that adult apprentices, with their maturity and industry experience, tend to be more careful and questioning, valued traits in a dangerous and highly regulated industry.

CCIWA does not make special concessions for adult apprentices, although their maturity and experience can be beneficial in class. Some adults (and juniors) get minor concessions in the apprenticeship term. The industry's shift to training packages, modules, competency-based learning and workplace training should enable adults to complete their training more quickly.

Date of study: Third quarter, 2001

Adult pathways in the electrical and metal trades: Electrolux, Adelaide

Electrolux is an international corporation employing about 90 000 workers globally and 1500 in Adelaide. It is the largest world producer of kitchen, cleaning and outdoor use appliances.

Australian operations were previously owned by the Email company. Adelaide is now the main Australian Electrolux operation, with two plants in Household Appliance Manufacturing (ANZSIC 2851), manufacturing white goods and plastics. These include washing machines, dishwashers, range-hoods, stoves, appliance motors, and plastic products. About 1000 employees are at the washing plant and the remainder at the cooking plant. This includes over 50 (3% of total) tradespersons or apprentices in metal and electrical trades.

Employer training perspective

Electrolux employs apprentices in the electrical (ASCO 43), mechanical (ASCO 41), and toolmaking trades (ASCO 4113). The washing plant employs apprentices from all three areas, the cooking plant the first two only. All apprentices are trained to become maintenance trades people, responsible for providing services around the clock. There are 18 apprentices, all currently drawn from company pre-vocational courses and established company workers.

Selection and training processes

Various pathways can be followed in acquiring an apprenticeship with Electrolux. These include VET-in-Schools programs, pre-vocational courses, traineeships, work in engineering-related areas, and upgrade by existing production workers and trades assistants.

From 2001, all apprentices are employed and trained by Engineering Employers of South Australia Group Training Scheme (EASSAGTS) and back-hired by Electrolux, whose training officer manages internal rotations. EASSAGTS interviews and tests (mechanical ability, problem-solving, mathematics, and literacy) all prospective apprentices. EASSAGTS is continuing the company policy of preferring non-school leavers or more experienced workers.

Up until 2001, the training of apprentices was administered by Email Training Services. Apprenticeship cohorts consisted of adults from production areas transferring to apprenticeships, adults employed at adult apprentice rates, and younger apprentices on junior rates. A competency-based training system has allowed apprentices to progress at their own speed through seven pre-determined pay scales. In some cases, a second-year student might be paid the same as a fourth-year student.

Electrolux apprentices are employed under the federal Metal Trades Award. 'Adult' pay scales apply to apprentices 21 years or over, 'junior' to 15–21. EASSAGTS has continued company policy of having a mix and match of apprentices on different pay scales for the first year, but it remains to be seen whether it will follow this policy, and that of the competency-based pay scales, as new apprentices come on board.

Adults and junior apprentices are trained similarly. Theirs is a traditional apprenticeship, with workplace assessment as the major means of assessing on-the-job competencies. Any competencies that cannot be delivered on the job are acquired at other venues.

The off-the-job training is co-ordinated by EASSAGTS. Apprentices attend induction sessions with EASSAGTS, for up to three months, before they are enrolled off the job at Regency TAFE or Nastec Solutions. EASSAGTS will also assess and credit apprentices for prior learning. Apprentices will also complete their probationary period, before joining the company. On the first day, they receive a company welcome and site tour.

Second-year apprentices acquire competencies on the job as well as attending off-the-job training for vocationally specific training. After 24 weeks, they will have completed all or 90% of their off-the-job training, both academic requirements and practical skills training.

During the last 20 months of contract, apprentices will complete off-the-job training, honing skills learnt during the first two years and in some cases engaging in more advanced learning. By the end of the fourth year, they are ready to become well-qualified tradespeople.

The company favours fast-tracking apprentices through off-the-job training if they have completed the appropriate modules, or have evidence of relevant skills. Thus, it is not age that differentiates apprentices but rather prior experience and knowledge. Recognition of learning and competence is especially important for adult apprentices.

Adults (over 25s)

Of the 18 apprentices, eight (44% of total) are over 25 and another six are aged 21–25. The company reports 100% completion rate with adult apprentices, whose numbers are expected to remain stable or increase given company policy favouring existing workers as apprentices.

Electrolux has a preference for mature and committed applicants, especially those who have completed prevocational courses. These can be fast-tracked through basic training and concentrate on more advanced areas, related to business needs, and leading to post-trade certificates. Workplace supervisors interviewed generally favour the adult apprentices.

With EASSAGTS, the company policy of preferring non-school leavers is likely to continue. The company benefits from having older apprentices who need a job and are more likely complete their trades and stay on.

Apprentice perspective

Five apprentices aged 28–33 were interviewed. All had Year 11 or 12. Three had worked in various jobs and then done pre-vocational courses leading into the Electrolux apprenticeship, two were company employees upgrading. One of these two noted, as a significant factor in his decision to switch to an apprenticeship, that he was able to keep his production-line wage.

The group wanted to learn skills that would prepare them for a better career future or steady them in their family responsibilities. Some reported an abiding interest in, or aptitude for, the trade, which they could now act on as a 'second chance'. The three who had come via the pre-vocational route said they responded to the company's advertised pitch for maturity and experience. All were satisfied, speaking favourably of the company's supportive attitude, the responsibility they were given, and the extra skills and opportunities being acquired.

Summary

Electrolux is a company with an established training ethos, which actually favours adult recruitment in the traditional trades, over 40% of the 18 apprentices being over 25. Under the new training provider EASSAGTS, adults are likely to hold their share of apprenticeships.

A variety of pathways—VET-in-Schools programs, pre-vocational courses, related traineeships, and working in engineering-related areas—can be a precursor to a company apprenticeship. Existing production workers and trades assistants may also become apprentices, and these are the source of many apprentices aged over 25.

Over-25s pursue similar training, with the advantage of fast-tracking (of wages and qualifications) in recognition of prior learning and competencies. With EASSAGTS now the provider rather than the employer, there is a concern that fast-tracking may be reduced.

Date of study: Third quarter, 2001

Adult pathways in the printing trades: Griffin Press, Adelaide

Griffin Press in Adelaide is the book manufacturing division of PMP Communications, a national publisher based in Melbourne. It operates in the industry class Book and Other Publishing (ANZSIC 2423).

The company employs about 160 people, this figure including an adjustment to convert casual employee hours into full-time equivalents. The figure includes about 45 (28% of total) tradespersons, trainees and apprentices in printing machining and binding and finishing. Nearly all trainees and apprentices are over 21 and drawn from existing workers.

Employer training perspective

The company has a fairly traditional approach to apprentice training, with all off-the-job training and workplace assessment being undertaken by Adelaide's Douglas Mawson Institute of TAFE (usually on block release).

Griffin employs 21 qualified printing tradespersons, eight printing machinists (ASCO 4912) and 13 binders and finishers (ASCO 4913). There are 15 apprentices and eight trainees, 23 in total. Of the 23, 13 are in printing machining and the remainder in binding and finishing.

Selection and training processes

Rather than recruiting externally, the company selects nearly all apprentices and trainees from its existing workers. Typically, these are casual company employees who move directly into apprenticeships, or into traineeships for one year and then to apprenticeships. The company interviews and tests its prospective apprentices for necessary aptitudes.

Casual employment makes sense in an industry with sharply fluctuating workloads. When a seasoned casual has a proven work history, both the company and the employee are well-placed to assess whether that person is a suitable apprenticeship prospect. Mid-1980s graphic arts award changes started this company trend toward using adult casuals and then turning them into apprentices (but see below for more recent award changes). A number of current managers and supervisors are themselves former adult apprentices with the company.

Apprentices are employed under the Graphic Arts—General—Award, which prescribes different rates for adults compared with 15–21-year-olds. Unlike adult apprentices, junior apprentices under 17 cannot be asked to work the presses between 9pm and 7am. Although extra shift pay can help compensate adults for the drop in pay upon entering an apprenticeship, these adults identify shift work as one of the (few) disadvantages of the adult apprenticeship.

Usually having similar work and company backgrounds, adult and junior apprentices undertake similar training programs. Although innovative and non-trade training pathways are not uncommon in the printing industry, this particular company follows a fairly traditional four-year pattern in which workplace training is complemented by off-the-job training (block release) in TAFE. With their greater experience and commitment, the adult apprentices are perceived to have slightly faster learning rates on average. An adult might complete a ten-day TAFE training block in seven or eight days and return to work early.

Adults (over-25s)

Of the 23 apprentices and trainees, 18 are over 21 and about half of these (40% of total) are over 25, considerably more than the over-25s national average share in printing trades. The company reports about 90% completion rate for both adult (over 21) and junior apprentices.

Company policy is that over-25s receive similar training to their younger colleagues. Traditional pathways are seen to offer good all-round training for all apprentices.

It is feared that the adult, and the over-25, shares of Griffin apprenticeships may fall over the next couple of years. Recent award changes stipulate that any casuals who go beyond 12 weeks must be given permanent employment if they are to remain on the payroll, although the casual period can be extended (once) for a further 12 weeks if the employee agrees.

This award ruling will lead to higher turnover of company casuals and tend to reduce the pool of seasoned casuals available for apprenticeship selection. To retain some of its training flexibility, Griffin could adopt an alternative strategy of back-hiring casuals from a labour-hire company, but this would entail higher costs.

Provider and apprentice perspective

The training provider, Douglas Mawson TAFE, believes that the conventional apprenticeship system can work well for adults. Adult apprentices have usually been out of the learning environment for a while, and TAFE usually tries to place adults with other adults who can lend classroom support. In computer-based pre-press trades, especially, adults may also suffer a learning disadvantage if they are not as computer-literate as the younger apprentices. Adults could suffer a significant drop in income on entering apprenticeship, although this could be alleviated to some extent by over-award payments.

Where (as is often the case with Griffin) apprentices have previously spent more than 12 weeks with the company, TAFE points out that their employer is no longer eligible for a 90% State Government subsidy for training materials and other expenses, previously made available under the SA 'user choice unit price list'. For a 770-hour program, Griffin would in such a case pay $7700 rather than $770. This change can be expected to depress adult printing apprenticeship numbers.

Three apprentices or trainees aged 21 through 40 were interviewed. All had been casuals with the company, although none had started out with the intention of taking up an apprenticeship.

The adults disliked the drop in pay with apprenticeship and the shift-work requirements, but all were positive about their prospects and expected to complete training. While the return to formal training could be a 'culture shock', TAFE was generally supportive. Both the employer and TAFE offered older apprentices something of a leadership role because of their greater maturity.

Summary

Griffin Press depends on its workforce of printing tradespersons, apprentices and trainees, who represent a quarter of company employment. About nine (40%) of its 23 apprentices and trainees are over 25, implying five to six apprentices over 25, with another nine apprentices and trainees in the 21–25 age bracket. A traditional apprenticeship pathway is the norm for older and younger apprentices.

The company mainly recruits its printing apprentices and trainees from established casual employees who have shown a liking and aptitude for the work. Adult apprentices dislike the pay drop and the shift-work requirements, but nearly all can expect to complete training.

The company and its training provider fear that adult training numbers may fall over the next couple of years. The main factors are an award change forcing casual employees (who want to stay on) onto the permanent payroll after 12 weeks, and the removal of a substantial State Government materials subsidy if apprentices have previously been employed with the company more than 12 weeks.

Date of study: Third quarter, 2001

Adult pathways in the automotive trades: MTA Group Training, SA

MTA Group Training Scheme (MGA–GTS) is a training organisation operated by the Motor Trade Association (MTA) of South Australia. Employing a total of 329 apprentices and 18 trainees, it serves about 180 host companies across SA. In addition to its apprentices and trainees, MTA–GTS employs a small number of accredited trainers and administrative staff.

Employer (scheme) training perspective

MTA–GTS apprenticeships extend across five automotive trades: motor mechanics (ASCO 4211), automotive electricians (ASCO 4212), panel beaters (ASCO 4213), vehicle painters (ASCO 4214), and vehicle body makers (ASCO 4215). There are also apprentices in the non-trade category of automotive parts interpreter (ASCO 6212–13). Because of low demand, there are no apprentices currently in vehicle trimming (ASCO 4216).

For this study, five SA host employers have been consulted: Andrew Craddock Marine, Australian Motors, City Holden, Formula Honda and Paradise Motors. In each case, those interviewed were the personnel manager, the (sole) adult apprentice and the apprentice supervisor. Their responses are incorporated in this case study.

Selection and training processes

MTA–GTS recruits mainly through advertisements in the press, via direct approaches from potential applicants, or by referral from host employers. All applicants, whether juniors or adults, are assessed by means of interview combined with aptitude and ability tests.

Successful applicants initially undertake ten weeks of training with MTA–GTS, completing, in effect, stage one of training. They are then placed with host employers to complete the remainder of their on and off-the-job training. Apprentices are rotated through several employers to broaden experience, although it is not uncommon to spend most of the apprenticeship with one employer. In the past, stages two and three of off-the-job training have been provided by a TAFE institute. As from 2001, MTA–GTS provides these stages. Where it is advantageous, some assessments may be conducted in the workplace by MTA–GTS trainers.

Apprentices are employed under the Vehicle Industry—Repair, Services and Retail Award. This award provides higher wage rates for adult apprentices, with the difference tapering off in the latter years. At the time of writing, adult rates were higher by 82%, 48%, 13%, and 1% for the first, second, third and fourth years respectively. MTA–GTS pays all apprentices the specified award rates. None of the apprentices receives over-award payments, one reason for this being that host employers are billed for the wages paid.

Adults (over-25s)

Of the 329 apprentices, 12 (4%) are adults, below the national adult average for auto trades. MTA–GTS estimates completion rates at about 95% for both adult and junior apprentices. One reason for adult apprentices not completing is pressure of family and financial commitments.

While MTA–GTS views increased adult participation as desirable, it does not expect much increase. The main employer disincentive identified is a recent increase in the margin of adult apprentice wages over junior wages. The five host employers do not expect much change across industry, although two anticipate changes within their own companies. One expects an increase due to the company's good experience with adult apprentices, the other a decrease because younger apprentices are 'more adaptable' to company requirements.

From the MTA–GTS perspective, adult apprentices exert a steadying influence on juniors' behaviour in training and in the workplace. On the debit side, some tend to be fixed in their ways compared with juniors, this being difficult to detect in the selection process. Host employers frequently rate adult apprentices as displaying greater maturity, dependability, responsibility, stability, and commitment than juniors. The negative aspects are the higher wages, lower ability to cope with new technology (such as computers) and, once again, the potential to be fixed in their ways. Employers, however, were careful to point out that these were generalisations that could be outweighed by individual differences unrelated to age.

A significant barrier to adults undertaking an apprenticeship is the drop in wages compared with their accustomed adult rates. Employers and adult apprentices, alike, see this as the biggest disincentive to acceptance of apprenticeship by adults. Although MTA–GTS feels that the higher adult rates might dampen employer enthusiasm for adult apprentices in the future, host employers do not rate this as a significant factor.

Provider and apprentice perspective

Training for apprentices employed by MTA–GTS follows a traditional block-release pattern in which apprentices are released from the workplace for set periods of time to undertake training with an external training provider. In the past, the initial ten-week block of training was with MTA–GTS and subsequent blocks (typically two weeks) with TAFE. MTA–GTS now provides all training. MTA–GTS host employers and apprentices believe that this training model and the underpinning apprenticeship system work satisfactorily for adult apprentices.

Of the five apprentices interviewed, four are males, ranging from 21 to 37 years of age at commencement of apprenticeship. Three are married with children, a difficult factor when trying to manage on the adult apprentice wage. The female adult apprentice, who is single, was aged 23 on beginning the apprenticeship. Reasons for pursuing adult apprenticeship include the qualification, interest in the work, desire to work in a managerial capacity, and plans for eventual self-employment.

All but one of the apprentices is certain of completing apprenticeship, the exception being a married apprentice experiencing financial difficulties with the low pay. These difficulties had already caused him to discontinue his apprenticeship once, to take up a higher paying job.

The female apprentice, moving to WA shortly after interview to take up the third year of her indenture, reported that her third-year WA pay was less than her second-year SA pay.

Summary

MTA–GTS is a group training organisation providing apprentices and training services to employers in the automotive retailing and repair industry. Although only a small proportion of its automotive apprentices (12 of 329, or 4%) are adults, their experiences and those of host employers suggest that the existing system of apprenticeship generally serves adults well.

Neither adult apprentices nor employers see any special provisions in work or training as being necessary. Employers generally regard the greater maturity, responsibility and commitment of adults as outweighing any age-related inflexibilities and the extra costs of apprenticing adults.

The significant blockage to the pursuit of apprenticeship by adults is the lower wage that they have to accept. This is especially hard on apprentices supporting a family. One apprentice, however, reports that corresponding WA rates are lower than those applying in SA.

Date of study: Third quarter, 2001

Adult pathways in the auto trades: Elwick Road Bodyworks, Hobart

Elwick Road Bodyworks is a motor body repair company (ANZSIC 5323, Smash Repairing) at Glenorchy, in the near suburbs of Hobart, Tasmania. In repairing motor bodies, the company employs tradespersons in panel beating (ASCO 4213) and vehicle painting (ASCO 4214).

Employer training perspective

The company employs seven people. This includes three qualified panel beaters (one of whom had recently completed an adult apprenticeship) and two apprentice vehicle painters (one adult and one junior).

Selection and training processes

In all, the company has employed three adult apprentices. Before their apprenticeship, two of these were employed for some years in an unqualified capacity—one as a panel beater, the other as a vehicle painter. The panel beater had been with the company 19 years before taking up an apprenticeship. A third adult apprentice was appointed from outside the company, but was released in the first year when personal circumstances led to unsatisfactory work performance. The currently employed junior apprentice joined the company after making contact through his school's work experience program.

Company training for apprentices follows a traditional pattern, with off-the-job training provided by Devonport campus of TAFE Tasmania. The adult panel-beating apprentice received substantial credit in his training, reducing the apprenticeship term from four years to about six months. Both the company and the apprentice reported that TAFE was very helpful in advising of options and procedures, and subsequently facilitating the RPL process. The adult vehicle-painting apprentice is also expecting to receive substantial credits.

Adults (over-25s)

Elwick Road Bodyworks is strongly supportive of the adult apprenticeship concept—particularly as a means of enabling experienced workers to gain a qualification. Apart from the benefits in work quality arising from a fully trained workforce, the company points to business benefits, such as the enhanced image and prestige projected by a fully qualified staff.

Although there is no immediate demand for further apprentices, the company's experience would lead it to consider adult apprentices in the future. In particular, the company would look for candidates with prior experience in the trade.

The issue of reduced wages during apprenticeship never arose for the two adult apprentices who remained with the company. As experienced employees, and treated as qualified tradesmen for all practical purposes, they remained on their existing adult wages.

Provider and apprentice perspective

The adult apprentice interviewed for this study was 39 years of age, married with a family and working in the trade for more than 20 years. Throughout his career, his goal had been to work as

a qualified tradesman in motor body repairs. Reading difficulties had prevented him from gaining apprenticeship in his earlier years. An attempt at recognition through tradesmen's rights certification (1991) proved too involved and difficult a process. The opportunity to undertake an adult apprenticeship and obtain recognition of competencies gained in the industry finally enabled him to qualify fully as a tradesman.

As a student at TAFE, the apprentice felt like the 'odd one out' because of his age. He did not interact much with other (junior) students, feeling that they 'did not want to learn'. The TAFE teachers treated him well, respecting his background and the knowledge he brought.

Devonport TAFE confirmed that there were no significant difficulties in teaching this adult student. The self-paced learning the college offered was well-suited to the needs of the student, enabling him to cover the areas of training needed in a short time. The student was said to be exceptional in already possessing nearly all of the competencies needed for qualification. Adult apprentices are rare, only two or three having passed through the panel beating and vehicle painting section of the college in recent years.

Summary

Elwick Road Bodyworks is a typical motor body repair company in the town of Glenorchy, Tasmania. Of seven people employed, three are qualified tradespersons and two are apprentices. One of the three tradespersons, a panel beater, had only recently completed an apprenticeship and was the adult apprentice subject of this case study. Another apprentice, a vehicle painter, was also an adult.

Both these adults had worked for the company as unqualified tradesmen before apprenticeship. In the case of the panel beater interviewed, this amounted to 19 years—a factor enabling him to complete apprentice training in approximately six months.

The company was strongly supportive of adult apprenticeship and indicated it would have no hesitation in hiring adult apprentices in the future—with the proviso that they should be adults with some past experience in the trade. The company has been prepared to keep adult apprentices on their previous company wages.

From the perspectives of the apprentice and the training provider, the apprenticeship system appeared to work well for persons entering apprenticeship as adults—at least for those with past trade experience.

Date of study: Third quarter, 2001

Adult pathways in electrical trades: ActewAGL, ACT

ActewAGL, the joint venture ACT electricity and gas supply company, employs about 900 people, about 800 with Actew in Electricity Supply (ANZSIC 3610). Actew employs about 250 trades workers (31% of workforce) in electrical-electrical distribution trades (ASCO 4311–13).

Employer training perspective

The work practices manager directs apprentice training. There are currently 38 apprentices (15% of total trades workforce), including two women, 34 in electrical and four in electrical distribution. Two of the electrical apprentices transferred across from electrical distribution.

Applicants to the advertised annual intake undertake an aptitude test administered by the local Utilities ITAB. About 25 are interviewed and eight to ten are finally taken on. Generally, successful applicants are males in their teens or possibly early 20s with Year 10–12.

Employer incentives do not greatly influence recruitment decisions, the critical factors being business needs. The ITAB plays a useful role in recruitment and induction, and one of the two ACT new apprenticeships centres assists in the administrative aspects.

Actew apprentices are employed under an enterprise bargaining agreement, but with close reference to relevant electrical awards. Pay rates are an issue, lines apprentice rates being markedly above those for electrical apprentices. This anomaly evens out once apprentices complete training. Qualified tradespersons can earn between $30 000 and $45 000, and access higher company positions with further training. The work practices manager himself is a former (non-Actew) electrical contractor.

Apprentices go through a conventional four-year apprenticeship with one day off a week for training at the Canberra Institute of Technology, Bruce Campus. On the job, apprentices are rotated through different departments, such as metering and communications. One valued feature in the training package is the suggested hours for different technical competencies. Monitoring against these ensures a breadth of training and competencies.

Actew has had satisfactory apprentices who have been through ACT VET-in-Schools programs. Other 'alternative pathways' are not common but, for example, lines tradespersons who transfer across to electrical would receive some recognition for current competencies.

Adults (over-25s)

Only two apprentices (about 5% of total) currently are over 25, but a larger number would be in their early-20s. The company reports nearly 100% completion rate with all apprentices. A few more adult apprentices can be expected from time to time.

Summary

About 30% (250) of the Actew workforce of 800 are in electrical or electrical distribution trades, and about 15% (38) of these are apprentices. Only two in the current apprentice group are over 25. The company mainly recruits school leavers, with a few recruits in their older teens or early-20s. Actew lines tradespersons may transfer across to electrical apprenticeships.

Actew is below the national electrical trades averages in terms of adult (over-25) apprentices, but above in terms of (all-age) completions. Being able to attract good quality apprentices with its broader training and career paths, the company does not appear to be under great pressure to recruit apprentices in older age brackets. The existing, standard apprentice rates would not be that attractive to older (over-25) recruits.

Date of study: Third quarter, 2001

Adult pathways in building trades: ACT Master Builders' Association Group Training

ACT Master Builders' Association (MBA) operates, among other services for 800 members, one of the oldest group training schemes in Australia. The scheme responds to the nature of the ACT industry, dominated by smaller contractors who struggle to carry a full-time apprentice.

MBA Group Training ACT (Inc.) employs apprentices in the building trades. Apprentices work day-to-day with MBA members in the ACT, the 'host employers'.

Employer (scheme) training perspective

Training of apprentices is directed by the group training and skills centre managers. MBA is a registered training organisation (RTO) using its skills centre for all off-the-job training.

There are currently about 100 apprentices, including one woman. Most are in carpentry and joinery (ASCO 4411), with most other major building trades (plasterers, roofers, tilers, painters and plumbers) represented except bricklaying. MBA is also the 'user choice', off-the-job training provider of choice for other apprentices employed outside the group scheme.

Selection processes

An annual intake is advertised, and the field is narrowed down to an intake of about 20, based largely on commitment and aptitude displayed at personal interview. Most of the successful applicants are males in their teens or possibly 20s with Year 10–12 qualifications.

Training intermediaries and incentives

The employer incentives flow directly to the scheme as the legal employer, and are an important factor in the economics of the scheme, including charge-out rates to employers. Unlike other employers, the scheme is not eligible for the same kind of 'completion' payment that individual employers still receive. The local ITAB (Construction Training Australia) plays a supporting role and new apprenticeships centres assist in the administrative aspects.

Industrial relations

Apprentices are employed under relevant ACT building awards, with host employers paying wages only for the time that apprentices actually work with them. The scheme always remains responsible for superannuation and other on-costs of employment.

Apprentice pay rates are quite low in the first year rising to about $30 000 or more on completion of trade. There is little variation from set rates, although some scheme apprentices may 'sign off' early and thereby earn full trade rates inside four years. As an RTO, the scheme can take full responsibility for assessing its apprentices' completion.

Training arrangements

Apprentices go through a four-year apprenticeship (this can reduce to about three years with early sign-off) with blocks of about one week in five spent at the skills centre for off-the-job training. Within the one-week blocks, older or more skilled apprentices can be assessed as competent (or above average) early in the week and thereby return directly to their employers.

While training on the job, apprentices are reassigned at fairly regular intervals to different host employers. An ideal rotation might be three months, but apprentices can stay for longer or shorter periods depending on work available in the industry or success with an employer.

The scheme is a supporter of school-based apprenticeships, currently about 12 of 100. School apprentices spend 3x4 weeks with employers, in Years 11 or 12 of the ACT college system. They complete a certificate II and complete the rest of the apprenticeship after leaving school.

The training package has a nominal span of over 800 hours for construction apprentices, but this can reduce to 600 hours-plus with early sign-off. The scheme may top up apprentices' business skills after completion of trade, as this aspect is not covered fully in the package.

Adults (over-25s)

About ten apprentices are over 25 (10% of total, about par with the over-25s national average share in building trades), with some more in their early-20s. The scheme reports about 95% completion rate with all apprentices.

Adult apprentices are expected to maintain their proportional share of the scheme. Low first-year apprentice wages are a disincentive for adults, who may make significant personal sacrifices to train. The rules for employer incentives are also an issue, as the scheme will not attract these for over-25s if they already possess (as is not unlikely) a certificate III qualification.

Adult apprentices can, however, look to a security of employment that they could not always find with smaller employers. On site, they are valued as mentors for younger apprentices.

Provider and apprentice perspective

Both the group scheme and skills centre managers are ex-TAFE employees. The skills centre adapts the training package into 15 informal modules (for example, Basic, Formwork and Timber Framing) which are taught on block, or sometimes day, release. The centre operates in a low-cost informal setting, bringing in industry to provide materials and realistic training exercises. The manager emphasises teaching skills and pastoral care in bringing the training package to life. He believes that adult apprentices can be attracted through marketing and a flexible, not overly academic, training environment. Adult apprentices could receive better support, possibly including extra employer incentives or personal income support to bridge income gaps.

Typically, over-25 apprentices are builders' labourers. They may suffer temporary wage reductions while in apprenticeship, perhaps offset by more rapid progression to third- and fourth-year rates and early sign-off. The apprentice interviewed commended the hands-on training and expected good wage and career prospects on completion. He regarded the trade apprenticeship as a significant broadening and deepening of his previous skills.

Summary

ACT MBA is a long-established group training scheme with an established training ethos servicing member builders in the ACT. About 10 (10%) of its 100 apprentices are over 25.

The scheme mainly recruits school leavers in its annual intake of about 20, with a few in the over-25 age group. The scheme is on par with the national construction trade averages in terms of adult (over-25) apprentices, but above-average in terms of (all-age) completions.

Over-25s can expect to at least maintain their share of places in the scheme over the next couple of years. Standard first-year apprentice rates are not attractive to older (over-25) recruits. This is offset by steady employment, flexibility of training, and prospects for faster progression to completion. The scheme illustrates positive employer–RTO attitudes and guidance, and flexible training and teaching, as signposts to success with adult apprentices.

Date of study: Third quarter, 2001

Adult pathways in the electrical trades: ACT Electro Group

Electro Group Training provides a group training scheme for electrical companies in the ACT and New South Wales. The rationale for the scheme is that employers are freed of administrative burdens and can gain access to more broadly trained apprentices 'on demand'.

The group's ACT Office services ACT and southern NSW. It is the formal employer of about 75 electrical apprentices. Electrical trade apprentices (about 50) work day-to-day with small, medium (10–20 employees) and larger (over 20) electrical contractors in the ACT, who serve as the 'host employers' for the group apprenticeships. All the lines apprentices (25) work day-to-day in Goulburn for regional energy company Great Southern (now Country) Energy.

Employer (scheme) training perspective

The operations manager directs apprentice training, assisted by field and training staff. The group uses Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT) for training of electrical apprentices and its own Goulburn Skills Centre for lines training.

The group carries about 75 electrical apprentices, including three women. About 50 are apprentice electricians (ASCO 4311) and the remainder apprentice linespersons (ASCO 4313). Numbers should be steady over the next two to three years, perhaps up slightly for linespersons.

Selection processes

The group does not advertise an annual intake, relying on its reputation to generate approaches from employers and individuals. Prospective apprentices are tested for technical aptitudes by the local Utilities ITAB and interviewed for suitability. This generates an ongoing pool of suitable applicants that the group can draw on from time to time in response to fresh employer demands. Successful applicants are usually males with Year 11–12 schooling, a fair proportion being over 21.

Training intermediaries and incentives

The DETYA employer incentives flow directly to the group as the legal employer, and are an important factor in its economics, influencing charge-out rates to employers. The group, however, is not eligible for the 'completion' incentive that individual employers still receive.

The local Utilities ITAB plays a supporting role in screening applicants. ACT new apprenticeships centres (NACs) assist in the sign-up and other administration, but are not seen to add major value. The group monitors its apprentices far more intensively than would a NAC or registered training organisation.

Industrial relations

Apprentices are employed under relevant ACT electrical awards, or sometimes under enterprise agreements, host employers paying wages only for the time that apprentices actually work with them. The group always remains responsible for on-costs of employment.

Award pay rates are quite low in the first year, less so for lines apprentices, and rising to about $30 000 or more on completion of trade. There is no adult (over-21) rate as such, although older apprentices may occasionally start out at the second- or third-year rate.

Importantly for prospective adult apprentices, the interplay of awards, agreements, and straight-out overtime offers quite good apprentice earning prospects for those adults who might be discouraged by standard award rates. A number of the electrical apprentices might be earning, with overtime, well over the award rate. The downside is that they may endure long hours of fairly repetitive tasks, to the detriment of broad skills acquisition.

Training arrangements

The electrical apprentices go through a four-year apprenticeship (early sign-off is not encouraged) with one day in five spent at the Canberra Institute of Technology for off-the-job training.

Quality of off-the-job training is an issue. While training on the job, apprentices are reassigned about four to ten times to different host employers. The group sometimes needs to push the hosts to release valued apprentices, in the interests of broadening their training.

The group participated in a recent ACT trial of school-based electrical apprenticeships, and has also made use of technical support traineeships that can lead into the trade. However, these initiatives have had limited impact on the mainstream training model offered under the Electrotechnology Training Package. A possible innovation, which might suit adults, would be to offer prospective apprentices a limited (three-month) period of upfront formal training.

NSW regional energy companies have outsourced training—Electro Group in the case of Country Energy. Lines apprentices do a four-year apprenticeship, training on block release at the group's skills centre. There seems to be more flexibility for acceleration of training and sign-off than with the electrical apprentices.

Over-25s

About a dozen of the group's apprentices are over 25 (16% of total, slightly higher than the over-25s national average share in electrical trades), with another 20 electrical apprentices in their early-20s. The group reports about a 95% or more completion rate with all apprentices, adult apprentices doing at least as well. Should apprentices fail to complete, quality of teaching or inability to cope with training are often implicated.

The group continues to encourage adult apprentices, as electrical trades are expanding in breadth and complexity (perhaps half of the work now available is low-voltage communications) and mature attitudes to safety are always a priority. Adults can be expected to maintain or increase their proportional share of the group's activity.

Training is fairly similar for the over-25s and other apprentices. Low first-year apprentice wages could a disincentive for adults, but there are some prospects of higher rewards via enterprise agreements and through overtime.

Summary

ACT Electro Group services ACT electrical contractors and a regional NSW energy company. About 16% of its current apprentice group of 75 are over 25, and over 40% are over 21.

The group does not have an annual intake, but maintains a pool of prospective apprentices by testing interested individuals who make approaches. It matches the national electrical trades averages in terms of adult (over-25) apprentices, and is well above the averages in terms of (all-age) completions.

Adults and over-25s, who are encouraged for occupational and safety reasons, are expected to hold or increase their share of apprentice places over the next couple of years. The standard first-year apprentice rates may not be particularly attractive to older (over-25) recruits. However, additional wages can be earned through applicable enterprise agreements and by doing overtime.

Date of study: Third quarter, 2001

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

NOTICE

Reproduction Basis

X	This document is covered by a signed "Reproduction Release (Blanket)" form (on file within the ERIC system), encompassing all or classes of documents from its source organization and, therefore, does not require a "Specific Document" Release form.
	This document is Federally-funded, or carries its own permission to reproduce, or is otherwise in the public domain and, therefore, may be reproduced by ERIC without a signed Reproduction Release form (either "Specific Document" or "Blanket").